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for

NOVEMBER

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Reginald Wright Kauffman
The frontier today—The Mexican Border

BLOOD OF PIONEERS — A Long Novelette
Wilbur Hall
The frontier of yesterday—the grim Sierras

THREE THOUSAND ACRES — A Novelette
L. Patrick Greene
The frontier in pioneer South Africa

THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION — A Novelette
Frank C. Robertson
Author of "The Fence Builders," in this number
The Western frontier, homesteaders and prairie schooners

RED STICKS — *Anthony M. Rud*
The Southern frontier—when the Southern States were a wilderness

THE SEA FOX — *James K. Waterman*
The frontier eternal—the sea, and a Yankee skipper

A PAIR OF TAN SHOES — *Magruder Maury*
America's farthest frontier, the Philippines

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AND OTHERS

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Frontiers

by Berton Braley

THERE'S always a new Frontier
For the fellow who goes to find it,
Though the boundaries are not clear
And the maps have not outlined it.
It's the place that is just beyond
Wherever you chance to be
That is touched by a magic wand
Of wonder and mystery!

There's always a new Frontier:
For one it is lone and far;
Another may find it near—
Just a jaunt in his flivver car.
It's the line where the humdrum ends,
The realm where the dreams begin,
Where the blue horizon bends
Over ports where the ships come in!

There's always a new Frontier
And it may be many a mile
Or close to the Now and Here
And bound by a woman's smile.
It's the goal of your heart's desire
The hope that you hold most dear;
Till your soul has lost its fire
There's always a new Frontier!

THE VALLEY OF ADVENTURE

By GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

Tattered, bearded and unkempt, John Miller, Kentucky ranger, stepped from the wilderness and faced the Mission San Fernando. Three years of perilous adventure lay behind him—ahead lay the stern death penalty for entering Spanish California.

CHAPTER I

THE BARBARIAN

DON GERONIMO turned quickly to face the broad door of the mission kitchen that gaped open to the night. A man stood just beyond the threshold; timid, hesitant as some creature from the mountains that pauses a moment in the campfire light or one of the nine hundred Indian converts on the mission estate, over whom Don Geronimo was mayordomo and overseer. The stranger was a tall man, more barbarous a figure than any the group in the kitchen had beheld in many a year, accustomed as they were to the primitive natives and conditions of Alta California in the year 1806.

The man's pantaloons were of deerhide with the hair on, save where it had been rubbed off by wear; his coat, tattered and in shreds, evidently part of a military uniform, the two brass buttons which remained on it bright in the candle beam. His boots of raw deerhide, hair outward, came to his knees; his cap, cut from the skin of a mountain lion, was crude and ill-fitting, large on his head as an Oriental turban. It came low on his forehead; an eagle feather was stuck into a slit with an attempt at the jaunty and debonair altogether ridiculous.

But for the pale blue of his faded coat, the man appeared all hair. His beard was a golden flare on his brown cheeks, rippled like water that runs in shallows over a sunlit bar; his hair fell to his shoulders in curls. He carried a gun with graceful lightness, the muzzle downward, the stock under his arm, and peered at the three men and the woman seated at the crude kitchen table, the legs of which were hewed from cedar beams that would have upheld an elephant, as though in doubt whether to trust himself inside the high, soot crusted walls or to escape into the darkness.

Within Borromeo Cambon leaned forward, his broad blacksmith's forearms on the table, mouth open, swallowing the wonder of this unaccountable stranger. Magdalena, her hand clutching her husband Don Geronimo's arm fearfully, stared with big eyes. Sergeant Olivera glanced swiftly to assure himself that his saber and brass-bound pistols still hung convenient to his hand on the back of his chair, then put his hand to his chin where

finger and thumb stroked as if they felt for a beard. No emotion was apparent on his lean, weather-beaten face. Don Geronimo rose, deliberately, as became the mayordomo of the great Mission of San Fernando Rey de España, and advanced to speak to the man in the door.

"Look!" said Magdalena, touching the soldier's arm.

"His hair is bright as an angel's. There is no harm in him."

"Who knows?" said Sergeant Olivera, still feeling of his chin.

"What is this?" Don Geronimo inquired, standing well within the door, hand lifted a little as if to guard against a sudden assault. "Who are you? what do you want?"

The stranger replied with courtesy and gentleness, as was apparent to all, but in a tongue that none of them could understand.

"What a savage!" said Borromeo. "If he prays, God can't understand such a tongue."

"He makes a sign that he is hungry," said Magdalena, compassion in her soft voice. "Bring him in, Geronimo; there is no harm in his face."

"He is carrying a rifle; it is forbidden," said Don Geronimo. "But how to make such a wild animal understand?"

"Ha! he understands Spanish after all," said Borromeo. "See? he is giving Don Geronimo his gun. How admirable!"

"He is as gentle as a dove," said Magdalena, rising to place a chair for the stranger at the great oak table, where the savory roast was cooling, the iron fork standing in it like a harpoon in the back of a whale.

"What a giant!" Borromeo said, with a sound of wonderment out of his pursed lips, like a man blowing to cool his soup. "He is nearly as big as I am, he is a man to lock arms with the blacksmith of San Fernando for a fall in the sand!"

Don Geronimo stood the rifle against the door, far out of the stranger's reach, conveying by his act that the weapon was not to be returned immediately, at least. This did not appear to concern the traveler, who stood looking about him with respectful, but keen interest in the kitchen and all it contained, which evidently was as strange to him as he was to his surroundings.

"I regret, sir," said Don Geronimo, coming around the table from placing the rifle beyond its owner's reach, "that you haven't the Castilian speech on your tongue, but that is not the favor of Providence to all men. Sit and eat; after that, we shall see."

Don Geronimo, like all of his blood, was almost as interpretive with gesture as with word. The stranger readily understood the invitation, spread so broadly with sweep of the hand, with slight inclination of the supple, slender body. He bowed not ungracefully, and seated himself in the proffered chair.

Magdalena placed the trencher of meat before him; the others watched him curiously, as if they expected him to pick it up like an Indian and set his teeth into it with a growl. Strangely, the man's interest was not in the meat, but the broken great loaf of bread that lay on the bare board of the table near Magdalena's place. He reached for the loaf, which he held a moment before his eyes as a man lifts a relic which brings him recollections of a happier day, then put it down almost reverently, clasped his hands on the table edge and bowed his head.

"He thanks God for bread!" Borromeo whispered. "So, he must be a Christian, and not a gentile out of the wilderness."

"His eyes are blue, blue as the little flowers on the hills in April," Magdalena said.

"There is no strength in a man with light eyes," Borromeo declared.

"He probably is German; only the Germans have hair the color of fool's gold," Don Geronimo said.

"It is his fast-day," Borromeo said, in his great gusty whisper. "See, he eats nothing but bread."

"What is your opinion of him, Sergeant Olivera?" Don Geronimo inquired.

"I think he is a Russian; that nation has country to the north of Alta California, I am told."

"Now he cuts meat; he feeds himself like a gentleman." Magdalena spoke with a certain triumph, as if she had assumed the defense of the strange man against the prejudices and perils that awaited him in that peaceful place, and must bring forward and magnify each small circumstance of his good behavior.

"What is to be done with him?" Sergeant Olivera inquired.

"That is a question for Padre Ignacio," Don Geronimo replied. "He is no Castillan, and a stranger who sets foot in California uninvited forfeits his life, by the King's decree to protect the missions."

The stranger was pushing back from the table, his face glowing in the satisfaction of repletion. He rose, spread his hands as if he surrendered all the gratitude of his breast for their hospitality, and bowed to the little company in turn.

"Attend me, then," Don Geronimo commanded, taking him by the arm to pilot him into the presence of Padre Ignacio. "Sergeant Olivera, do me the favor to march

behind, and see that your pistols are loaded."

"It is a shame!" Magdalena protested. "There is no wickedness in the man; his heart is as soft as a peach."

CHAPTER II

"JUAN MOLINERO"

CAPTAIN DEL VALLE, commander of the military forces in the jurisdiction of the Pueblo de los Angeles, whose headquarters was at the Mission San Fernando Rey de España, sat alone at table with Padre Ignacio in the lofty dining-hall. Padre Ignacio had come late to the table that evening, for he carried a multitude of cares. The office of host usually was filled by his younger assistant, Padre Mateo, who liked the chatter of drovers and traders, who were becoming more numerous on the roads of Alta California every day.

Padre Ignacio was saddened by this invasion which had been increasing so rapidly through the past ten years. There was a forecast in it that disturbed him, a thing that had given him many a sleepless hour and set him pacing the length of his vast chamber overhead. These men were as the dust that came ahead of the rising storm of change that Padre Ignacio knew in his heart soon would sweep the old order away in Alta California. But to a man who was younger, who had come after the trails were worn broad, the last adobe long since laid in the last mission walls, the last tile fixed, it did not signify so much. A younger man could bear it better, having no memories to be wrenched away.

Padre Ignacio had come down from his chamber only a little while before to join in meat with Captain del Valle. The padre's room, spacious as the quarters of a king, and bare as if its occupants had deserted it and carried everything of value away, extended across the width of the mission building in the east end. It was floored with tiles, in which the feet of Padre Ignacio and those who had gone before him had worn little channels through the hard surface down to the softer core, which appeared like tracings of duller red on the red-brown of the fire-baked adobe. From door to altar, from altar to window, from window to the low, hard, austere couch, these little markings of sandaled feet were traced, and down the length of the room in its very center, the broadest and deepest line. Here Padre Ignacio wore down his troubles, spent his meditations, worked out the welfare of the hundreds of half civilized men and women who were gathered here under his control.

A mighty cedar beam, the mark of the broad-ax in its squared sides, bridged the room across its width, not quite the height of Padre Ignacio's head from the floor. A man must remember this beam, as he must have in mind forever and unceasingly the obstacles of life, and not dash without a thought for his chamber door in the dark. He must have it in mind when he paced, hands at his back, head bowed in sombre meditation, like a penance which he could not for a moment forego. It was an obstacle in the current of serenity which a man forgot at his peril.

Now, as Padre Ignacio sat at supper with Captain del Valle, there was a red welt across his forehead, as if someone had given him a blow. Captain del Valle said nothing, although his eyes made inquiry with curious insistence. Padre Ignacio wet a napkin in wine and held it to the flaming excoriation.

"I forgot the beam that crosses my chamber," he said, contritely. "I should have remembered, but a thing happened this evening that caused me great perturbation, and I inflicted my own punishment, as a man must suffer always for his remissions."

Padre Ignacio smiled, dabbing the wet napkin to his hurt. A spare, tall man, almost frail, he seemed, in spite of the amplitude of his long brown gown of coarse linen. His face was long and narrow, and he was brown as sun and wind could turn him, even to the tonsure of his crown, which time had broadened so that razor was no longer called for there.

"I heard that Don Geronimo had been laying his long whip heavily on somebody's back," Captain del Valle said.

"Yes, it was a youth called Cristobal, a quick-minded lad who is not understood by Geronimo, I fear. The poor fellow, in some sort of wild resentment, got on a horse and tried to run away, to join this bandit Alvitre, Geronimo says, but I think there is only fancy in such a charge. Geronimo grows too severe; I must ask our president to put a restriction on him."

Captain del Valle looked up sharply, as if he had heard a discord in the rendition of a maestro. He was a short and puffy man, grown fat from idleness and much feeding at this mission post and that. It was his habit to fill his cheeks with his breath in any period of astonishment, expectation, small crisis or small climax of his rather inconsequential

life, which gave him the appearance of a squirrel carrying acorns.

He knew that Padre Ignacio referred to the president of the missions when he spoke of having a restriction put on the mayordomo of San Fernando. Captain del Valle was a man who had run counter to ecclesiastical authority in California during his day; there was no love in him for the president.

"Is Padre Lasuen expected, then?" he asked.

"He will come on his periodical inspection in a few days, unless delayed in the south. What is this?" Padre Ignacio rose as Don Geronimo appeared in the door which led through the butler's pantry into the kitchen. Captain del Valle, his back in that direction, squirmed in his chair to see. "What is this parade, Geronimo?"

"It is this savage from no man knows where," Don Geronimo replied. "He appeared at the door a little while ago as if he had dropped from the clouds, carrying a rifle under his arm. I have brought him for your disposal."

Padre Ignacio went forward, brows drawn in his sharp scrutiny of the crudely garbed stranger, severe, unfriendly to behold.

"Where do you come from?" Padre Ignacio asked.

The stranger leaned forward in his eagerness to grasp the meaning of the words, a keen look of intelligent concentration in his eyes. He shook his head slowly, disappointment coming over him like a shadow.

"He doesn't understand Castilian," Don Geronimo explained.

Padre Ignacio was not much of a linguist, outside the Indian dialects and the Latin that he had used so long that it had become more as a natural endowment than an accomplishment. He tried the stranger in the Indian tongues of the several tribes spread up and down the California coast, winning only a deepening of the look of perplexity; tried him with medieval Latin, only to see a baffled look come into the man's eyes, and an expression of intense confusion rise in his face.

"We'll get nowhere with him at this," Padre Ignacio said. "Let us have Father Mateo at him; he is master of many modern tongues."

Padre Ignacio went to the door to summon his coadjutor, who came quickly at his superior's summons, followed by several of the guests for the night, who had glimpsed the stranger's remarkable presence through the open door.

BEHOLD this wanderer from God knows where, Brother Mateo. See if you can get anything out of him with the modern tongues; I can do nothing with him."

"What is this now?" said Padre Mateo, clapping the stranger heartily on the shoulder, smiling assuringly. "You look like a German; let us try you in that voice. Can you speak German, friend?" he inquired in that tongue.

The stranger's face beamed at the sound; the light of a smile leaped in his eyes.

"*Nein, nacht, nicht,*" he stammered. "*Ich vas—Ich bin*—American—United Stateser."

"Oh, American. Then English is your tongue," said Padre Mateo, with the greatest ease of transition, addressing him in the idiom that he understood.

The stranger was so pleased to hear intelligible sounds issue again from a human mouth that he almost leaped.

"Padero, you don't know how glad I am to meet somebody that can talk God's own language again!" he said.

"What does he say?" Padre Ignacio inquired.

Padre Mateo translated the words, at which varying expressions of disgust, disdain, astonishment and even mirth, passed over the faces of those who stood around to hear. But it was only on the face of Padre Ignacio that the smile was to be seen.

"So much for the vanity of the Spaniard, who says his own tongue is the only one fit to address the Almighty in," he said. "Take him aside where he will be at ease, Brother Mateo; give him tobacco, if he wants it, and draw his story from him. When I have finished my supper I will hear the account. Well," looking the stranger over again with gentle humor in his brown dry face, "you are a big bird to fly so far from home."

Don Geronimo and Sergeant Olivera attended the stranger and Padre Mateo to the bench on the arched portico beside the door. Padre Ignacio had finished his supper long since, and was sitting with his goblet of sour wine before him, enfolded in meditation, the stranger probably far out of his thoughts, when Padre Mateo and his charge returned.

"It is a strange tale that he tells," Padre Mateo said. He bore himself like a man who wanted to believe what he had heard, yet feared the judgment of others in the light of its improbability.

Padre Mateo stood by with thumb hooked in the cord that gathered his rough gown about his middle, a florid man of good stature,

with sturdy, well-borne shoulders, and good-natured, rather rustic face. He seemed hesitant over his beginning. The stranger stood close by the padre's side, alert to all that was going forward; between them and the door, as if making a background for the drama then shaping, the travelers who were guests of the mission, Don Geronimo, Sergeant Olivera and Captain del Valle were grouped, none of them wiser for what had passed between the American and his interpreter than Padre Ignacio himself.

"If it is a strange tale, it fits the man," said Padre Ignacio. "Proceed, Brother Mateo."

"This stranger, then, says that he comes from a land called Kentucky, a place I have heard of, Padre Ignacio, and I think it may be true as he says. This Kentucky is a province of the new American republic founded by Washington—you will remember, Padre Ignacio, that a ship from the United States of America put into the bay of Monterey some years ago, but none of its men was permitted to land."

"I remember the ship, with its strange flag," Padre Ignacio said.

"This man tells a thing that is almost incredible, quite incredible, I believe, in the absence of verification. He says that Napoleon of France has sold to the President of the United States the territory of Louisiana. It is a thing that casts a doubt on his integrity."

"How long ago does he say this took place?"

"As much as three years, Padre Ignacio."

"It may be true; we have no right to doubt him. The wars that engage Spain have kept our ships from the seas, we have had no news these five years from Europe here in California. But what has the sale of Louisiana to do with this man's presence here?"

"He says that the President of his country sent out an expedition to explore the new territory, through and beyond the Stony Mountains to the Pacific. This man was one of the party of surveyors or explorers, attached to the expedition as hunter. The party reached the Pacific, he declares, crossing the snowy mountains and passing in boats down the great Oregon River, which he declares has been named the Columbia. Midway of the mountains, on the return home, this man was lost in a snow storm which continued many days. His wanderings led him into a maze of mountain and desert, so far from his comrades that he gave up all hope of finding them. He made a course to the south, hoping to find Santa Fe, in Spanish territory, where he might meet hunters, or a caravan of French traders with whom he could return to the Mississippi.

"But no; he was too far to the west. Nothing remained to him in that misadventure, he declares, but to point his way like a mariner at sea, over desert and mountain toward California. A ship, he thought, might come some day to a port of that land and carry him to his own country. So he breaks out of his exile in mountain and wild waterless desert, and comes in the night like a moth led by a candle, to the open kitchen door of this mission, and here he stands, let his tale be true or false."

"How long ago does he say it was since he lost his comrades in the storm?" Father Ignacio inquired.

"He says it was in April."

"And it is now September," Father Ignacio said, looking with strange mingling of compassion and admiration upon the man who had borne such adventures in an unpeopled land. "Ulysses wandered longer, but he did not go so far. It is a strange tale, as you have said, Brother Mateo, but not incredible. Geronimo, see that he is well lodged, give him suitable clothing, have the barber attend to his hair."

"Padre Ignacio, your pardon, but a word!" Captain del Valle stepped forward quickly, still red about the eyes from the extraordinary puffing of his cheeks which he had practiced during Padre Mateo's recital of the stranger's story. "This is a matter for the civil authorities, a thing of the highest importance. By his own confession this man comes to spy the land, one of a party of soldiers. I request that this man be delivered to me, to be held for the order of his excellency, the governor. It was against such as he the decree against strangers was drawn."

"It is a strange rudeness, Captain del Valle, to interfere with my hospitality. Upon what grounds do you justify this demand?"

"Padre Ignacio," Captain del Valle's voice was grave and severe, his manner suddenly that of the stern and haughty soldier who knows no greater law than that of his immediate duty, "the story this man tells of the purchase of Louisiana Territory by the Yankee republic is true; we have known of it many months. The country of the Yankee republic now touches the dominion of Spain; it is but a step from the purchase of Louisiana by some shrewd trick of this nation of sharp traders, to the seizure of the Spanish dominion of New Mexico, California. The military authorities have been warned; we have been watching. This man is a spy. I demand his surrender in the king's name!"

"It is folly," Padre Ignacio returned, leveling the captain's argument and demand to nothing with an impatient sweep of the hand.

"He stands condemned by his own act in entering California," Captain del Valle protested, his temper rising, his face losing its color in the seriousness of his purpose. "The edict of King Carlos and the Cortes never has been revoked. California is closed to foreigners; to enter it is death."

"That applies only to those who come in the spirit of conquest, or to trade; not to a poor wanderer such as this. Peace, Captain del Valle! This man is under ecclesiastical jurisdiction; the hospitality of this place shall not be abused."

"You overstep your bounds, Padre Ignacio," the soldier contended, not new in this controversy between military and ecclesiastical authority in Alta California. "You are not greater than king and Cortes. But very well; to-night I grant the sanctuary you have given this innocent barbarian, as you seem to believe him. But let him set foot in the king's road——"

"Peace!" commanded Padre Ignacio, sternly, lifting an interdicting hand. "Take him, Geronimo, as I have directed, and attend to his comfort. But stay; what is your name?"

"He says it is John Miller," Padre Mateo answered, after repeating the question. "In Castilian, Juan Molinero."

"Juan Molinero," Padre Ignacio repeated, strangely, as if he found a marvel in it. "What a propitious name!"

Chapter III

SAN FERNANDO REY DE ESPAÑA

"WHAT a strange man you are, John Miller," said Padre Mateo, looking at him in unmasked admiration as they walked together at the border of a field of maize, where the hurrying clear water of an irrigation ditch murmured over the boulders with which its bottom and sides had been paved with infinite labor and pains.

"Yes; the barber turned a basket over my head and cut around the edges. I couldn't make him understand that I wanted it cut close to my head, or maybe he thought the shock of losing so much hair all at once would be too great."

"He could not understand why anybody but a soldier or a priest would want his hair and beard shorn away at all." Padre Mateo laughed. "It is the fashion among the *gente fina*, that is to say the best people, to wear the hair long, and the beard in such fashion as you saw on Captain del Valle's chin. You would have been better for a beard, brought to an arrow-head point, and for some of your golden ringlets, at least long enough to strike you mid-neck. Such a hat as you have, with its high peak and broad brim, makes your clean face look like a pea."

"It's the fashion in my country to wear the face smooth, Padero."

"Padre, padre," the priest corrected him, patiently, evidently not for the first time. "Stop where you are, Juan Molinero, and stand until you have it right. Now, say it after me, slowly: Padre Mateo, Padre Mateo."

Padre Mateo beat out the simple syllables with his finger as if he directed a tune; John Miller, henceforward to be Juan Molinero in California, stood by with long lean legs spraddled, repeating the two words until he had both sound and inflection as smooth on his tongue as oil.

"Now, that will do very well," Padre Mateo commended him. "Your tongue is not stubborn; you will acquire the speech readily. It is necessary, it is very necessary, that you begin at once. And what age have you now, Juan?"

"Thirty-three."

"That is a good age, that is a man's age; it was the age of Our Senor. You will grow as big as an oak here in California—if you keep within the bounds of the mission, and out of Captain del Valle's hands."

"I thought that little toad of a soldier had his eye on me last night. What have I done? what's wrong?"

"You have come to California, Juan Molinero," Padre Mateo gravely replied. "That is enough. There is a law that closes this land to all other men, and the penalty on the head of a foreigner who enters here is death."

"The devil you say!" Miller stopped, staring in amazement at hearing such a barbarous edict. "What's the reason you don't hand me over, then? If that's the law, how does it come that I'm safe in one place and not in another?"

"There is one law for the civil authorities, another for the missions," the priest returned. "You have heard of ecclesiastical law?"

"Yes, I've heard of it."

"And of sanctuary, Juan Molinero?"

"Sanctuary, yes. But that was a long time ago; they don't have laws that a man's safe from when he dodges into a church in these days."

"That is still the law here, Juan Molinero. You are under ecclesiastical protection; you have found sanctuary here with us at this mission. But if you put foot in the king's road before our door—then, there is Captain del Valle and the king's edict. It is very simple."

"That's a strange fix for a man to be in," said Miller. He talked on with head bent, plainly downcast and troubled by his peculiar peril. "And I've got to stay here, right here on this farm, till ages know when? Is that it?"

"If you leave your sanctuary, it is very plain that Captain del Valle will carry you before the governor, who is a stern man, a man without mercy. He will apply the law without a doubt, my poor Juan Molinero; he will stand you against the first wall and shoot you through the heart."

"That's kind of a snap-judgment to take on a stranger," Juan Molinero mused as he curbed his long stride to conform to the priest's leisurely gait.

He appeared more interested in the peculiar phase of the situation than concerned over his own peril.

"It seems an inhospitable decree, indeed," the priest admitted, "but you can see that it is necessary to protect a land so isolated as California from the feet of adventurous men. The king wanted the great work of redeeming these gentiles to go forward without molestation or curious onlooking from strangers. It was, it is, the work of holy church alone."

"But it's holy church, as you call it, that's taken me under its wing. How's that?"

"That is another matter, Juan Molinero," Padre Mateo said, haughty and distant, as if he had withdrawn into the secret places where holy church kept its reasons for its commissions and omissions hidden away from the eyes of men. "But this I will have you know: Padre Ignacio gave you sanctuary before he heard your name."

"My name?" said Juan Molinero, his wonder widening into amazement. "My name don't carry any weight way out here in California. What's my name got to do with any act of friendship any man does me here?"

"The moment Padre Ignacio heard your name pronounced he declared that Providence had sent you. We have wanted a miller sorely here at San Fernando, and there were no more in the prisons of Mexico."

"But I'm a miller in name, only, Padre Mateo. As I have told you, I was a planter in Virginia, and later in Kentucky, growing tobacco. That, and hunting game in the woods, and defending my life against wild Indians, is all I know."

"It does not matter, Juan," Padre Mateo declared, easy and confident in his way as a man who saw the certainty of a thing desired. "You shall do it. You shall build his water-mill. His faith in you, his great hope, will be your inspiration. Yonder is the dam, and there is the sluice that is at once for the mill-wheel and the mother ditch of our irrigating system. The poor mill! It has been a sad failure, Juan; the grist is splashed and ruined by the wheel. It is a thing we have not been able to overcome."

"No wonder!" said Juan, smiling as he looked at the clumsy arrangement. "You've got your hopper right against your wheel—how on earth did you ever expect to keep the grist dry?"

"See?" said Padre Mateo, jubilant, beaming in satisfaction. "Already you prove that Padre Ignacio was not mistaken. If you know nothing of mills, how do you know this? Ah, Juan Molinero, you are the man! He shall have the mill of his heart at last."

"It's plain you've got to move the burr-stones off a distance, and house them against the weather," said Juan, curiously studying the details of the crude mill. "A long shaft is what you want, Padre, connecting the wheel and the burrs by a little trick called a bevel gear. It's as simple as a clock."

"Hear him!" Padre Mateo applauded, speaking as if to an audience apart. "Juan Molinero is the physician who puts his hand on the ailment of our poor crippled mill; Juan Molinero is the artificer who shall set it turning out a golden stream of flour. Padre Ignacio never had faith in a man to be deceived."

"There's water enough," said Juan, eying the lake that filled the deep river-bed and flooded to the flanking hillocks. "You picked a good site for your dam."

"It will be a blessing when you get the mill turning, Juan. As it is, all our flour and meal of the maize are ground by hand-turned stones, with a sweep that the Indians put shoulders to and tramp a dizzy circle hour after hour. They are discontented at such labor; too often the lash of good Geronimo cuts their backs when they lag. When the water is set working for us, it will be a pleasure to feed the mill and carry away the warm meal from its mouth. Your work here will be a blessing, Juan; you shall hear them sing when they carry in the corn."

"So that Geronimo feller whips 'em, heh? That's what the long whip that I saw hanging by the door is for, what?"

"They are children, wilful and defiant children, very often, Juan. You will understand when you come to know them. Now, do you think it is possible that one wheel can be made to turn two sets of stones, and produce a greater amount of grist?"

"Yes, it looks to me like that wheel's plenty big enough to turn two burrs. But one will be plenty, I think, going all the time; it would turn out all you could use."

"There is a great demand in the growing pueblo, from the ranchers who are settled around us, even from the other missions. We could sell our surplus flour at good advantage, adding greatly to the revenues of the mission. You can see what a business we have here, Juan Molinero; from this elevation you can sweep our valley by a shift of the eye."

Juan Molinero had been shifting his eye, requiring no prompting to that purpose. His long experience in surroundings where lapse of care and vigilance for a moment might cost his life had trained him to acquaint himself with what lay about him, leaving no mysteries unexplored that the eye could pierce. He stood on the dam, a tall, a lean and hardy man, viewing what lay before him with wonder and admiration which grew as the details of the vast enterprise were gathered.

THE great mission building which fronted upon the king's road, El Camino Real of California history and romance, lay farthest away from the point where Juan Molinero, in his Spanish garb and name, stood looking down upon the scene. This building of adobe, or sun-dried bricks, was more than two hundred feet in length, rising two lofty stories, with a breadth of fifty feet. Its walls at the foundation were eight feet thick, the arches of its few and small windows seemed embrasures in a fortress. The gray adobe walls were coated with white stucco, harmonious contrast against the surrounding greenery of vineyards and fields. The roof was of tiles, soft in their dull red, a mellow dash of color to delight the appreciative eye.

A long arcade, perhaps five hundred feet in length, ran from the northeast corner of the main building to connect with the church which stood on the bank of the little river. This passage was open to the west, where the familiar arches of monastic architecture looped in grateful diversion with the general severity and simplicity of the design. Along the east side of this long passage between mission-house and church, several small buildings stood. These were of uniform size and design, and were the homes of the mission's various attaches, such as the mayordomo, the artisans who raised new buildings and kept all in repair, as well as the officers of the garrison.

All these buildings were plastered with stucco that gleamed marble-white in the sun, all roofed with the uniform red, soft-tinted tiles. It was a finished enterprise, to the last detail of convenience for that day, and fashioned and molded in the marvelous faith and perseverence of its builders out of the very earth on which it stood. Even a fountain was tossing a sparkling jet high among the greenery in the quadrangle that cornered between mission building and the padres' walk under the shady arcade.

The fields were lively with bright colors where the Indians were at work, some with hoes among cabbage and turnips and potatoes, some with spades mending the embankments of ditches where the life-giving water sparkled as it ran. Some were threshing grain by throwing it under the feet of numerous cattle yoked up four abreast and driven at a trot around a circular corral. Near them others were rendering tallow, so Padre Mateo said, in vats built of bricks and lined with plaster. In a vineyard enclosed by a high adobe wall, women and children were heaping ox-drawn carts with grapes.

"There is none of the corruption of idleness here," Padre Mateo said, pride and satisfaction in his voice.

"It's a beautiful place! there's room for a thousand farms in this valley—ten thousand, I expect," Juan Molinero replied.

"Not at this time," Padre Mateo denied. "We want no more encroachment on the mission lands. They are hemming us already, they are beginning to grumble that the mission cattle and sheep are eating up the grass. No, we do not want any more farms or towns, Juan. That is a mistake of the government, which pays adventurous men a bonus and gives every one of them a gun and a leather shield to stop the Indians' arrows, inciting them to come to California and make settlements. It is a sad mistake."

"Of course, I don't know anything about the situation," Juan Molinero said, speaking slowly, as if his astonishing discovery had left him few words.

Padre Mateo clambered up the steep embankment, his brown gown lifted to disencumber his feet, discovering bare legs and sandals beneath. He stood beside the tall

wayfarer, and stretched his hand out over the valley.

"It is a fair scene," he said, his pride in it well justified; "I doubt if the earth can show a fairer. But there are men who would overturn it all, Juan, snatch these lands that we have improved from rough wild places from us, turn all our poor Indians away to shift for themselves, and bring a deluge of sorrow where there is now contentment and prosperity."

"You don't tell me?" Juan exclaimed, quickly interested in this revelation. "What is it? Politics?"

"You are quick, Juan Molinero." Padre Mateo approved, but with grave face, slow nodding head. "You are a man who can see through a wall. Yes, it is a matter of politics. They are beginning to talk secularization of the mission properties in California, of turning them over to the state, so the work of our hands may become the profit of designing scoundrels who do no work, except in the crooked ways of evil."

"It's that same way everywhere, I guess, Padre. There are some people that can't stand the sight of other folks' prosperity."

"Well, they have a long way to go before they turn us out; your mill will see a great deal of wheat go into its hopper before that day. Let us go now; you will want tools and material to begin your work. Besides, Juan, there is a sight to be seen this morning. This is the day our winepress begins its happy service—they are gathering the grapes for it now."

Chapter IV

The Winepress

AN OX-DRAWN cart was coming into the courtyard behind the imposing administration building as Juan and Padre Mateo approached. Baskets of purple grapes big as wild plums, they appeared to Juan Molinero, were piled high in the cart, behind which there walked a young Indian, a tall and graceful youth, who carried his head so high that he seemed unconscious of his feet among the fragments of broken tile, brick and sunken cobblestones with which the court was paved.

Juan Molinero's attention was fixed on the Indian following this juicy load, a figure that expressed so much of suppressed defiance and revolt in its erect carriage, its detached bearing from the enforced task, however pleasant it might seem. The young man's face was gaunt and severe, sealed and impressed with the stamp of silent repression. It was the first Indian countenance marked with nobility and quickness of intellect that Juan had met among the hundreds which he had viewed that morning.

"Come this way, Juan; you shall see our noble winepress," Padre Mateo beckoned, one foot within the door, the arch of which was six feet thick above his head.

"What a way to yoke oxen!" said Juan in high contempt for the crude and barbarous method that made the creatures' labor a long-drawn agony.

He lingered in the court, pity in his face for the suffering brutes, on whose withers streams of blood were black-streaked in the dust, where the unsparing driver had urged and directed them as he had been taught.

"Do you know a better way?" Padre Mateo inquired, with a touch of contempt in his tone.

"A better way!" Juan derided. "Why, you couldn't think of a worse way. Who ever would imagine oxen yoked by the horns, the yoke *tied* to the horns with ropes? They could pull about as much with their tails!"

"And there is another way, then, Juan Molinero?" Padre Mateo's resentment at this criticism of time-established usage was failing; he was a shrewd man, a servant of an institution that had grown great on its ability to see, its readiness to employ, the cunning and the wisdom of shrewd men.

"The yoke ought to set back on the shoulders, with a bow under the necks," Juan replied. "Haven't you ever seen a yoke like that? Why, they're used in every Christian country under the sun, have been since Adam made the first one, I guess."

"That is another thing you shall show us, then, if there is any advantage in it, Juan."

"Advantage? Why, I tell you, Padre Mateo, one span of oxen can draw as much as three span hitched this way."

"Then you shall show us the better way, Juan Molinero. Truly, God directed you here to teach us many things. I am ashamed to show you the winepress now, that was the pride of our hearts yesterday. Perhaps you will say we are savages when you see it. But come."

The winepress would have passed undiscovered by Juan Molinero if he had been left to find it for himself. It was nothing more than a big bowl, made of bricks, plastered with cement, built into a corner of the passage, or area-way, into which the arched door opened. It was about as high as a man's head, six or seven feet square, tapering

toward the bottom. A ledge was fashioned around the interior walls to hold a framework, or strainer, laced with strips of rawhide, a space of a foot or so between it and the bottom of the press to admit the free passage of the juice, the compressed pulp remaining on the sieve, which could be lifted out as required.

A line of young men, baskets of grapes on their heads, marched in and emptied their loads into the winepress; Padre Ignacio gave the word, the girls with washed feet clambered nimbly up the side and began trampling out the wine. At first they stepped shyly on the cool rich grapes, promising little for Padre Ignacio's hopes. Presently the juice began to bubble pleasantly between their toes, bringing little exclamations of wonder, little starting smiles of pleasure. Absorbed in the new aspects of this task, moved to nimbler prancing by the reward of gushing juice, which broke in sharp little jets now and then, spraying faces and bare arms, the girls began to chatter and laugh.

"It is the same as in the days of old," Padre Mateo said. "Even these poor daughters of savages shout with joy as they tread out the wine."

The chief ceremony, so Padre Mateo said, was to be the drawing off of the first juice from the press. Padre Ignacio himself was to do this; no other hand was worthy the distinction of that long-waited day. At the very bottom of the wine-press, in the gloom at the foot of the cellar stairs, a half cask stood under the spiggot, which was itself made of a small cedar log with the heart hollowed out, the end closed with a plug. Padre Ignacio now descended to drain off the first juice trampled out in a winepress in California.

Magdalena came from her kitchen, which opened through a narrow door into this cellarway, to see this ceremony; the young men who carried in the grapes stood with empty baskets; the girls in the winepress, their dark faces spattered with stains, leaned along the edge, looking down on Padre Ignacio's fringe of snow-white hair as he bent, gown gathered between his knees, to remove the plug. Borromeo Cambon, the blacksmith, was in the door.

They sighed in pleasurable exclamation when the thick stream of dark juice poured into the deep tub. Padre Ignacio let it run until the tub was full; the juice was running strong when he replaced the plug.

"It is a fruitful year; the grape skins are stored with wine. We shall have plenty at last," he said.

"There are dry throats waiting for it," said Borromeo, as he turned from the door to go back to his forge.

"Geronimo, there is a messenger from the harbor of San Pdero, asking to see Padre Ignacio," Magdalena announced.

Padre Ignacio returned in a little while, letters in his hand, trouble furrowing his brow. He beckoned Padre Mateo; Juan Molinero saw them stand talking in the white sunlight of the court a little outside the door.

"Here is a business!" said Father Ignacio, gesticulating with the unfolded letters. "The ship has been in the harbor these two days."

"So far ahead of the time we expected it? Does it bring any news from Spain?"

"Not that I know, Brother Mateo, but it brings a woman who begs sanctuary in the mission San Fernando!"

"A woman?" Padre Mateo's eyes grew wide. "It is incredible! Is it one of these adventuring strumpets the viceroy has been solicited to send here to marry his off-cast soldiers?"

"No, not of that kind. It is the daughter of Jose Sinova, he who had the grant to the south of us from the king for his services in the wars. Jose was on his way here, with all his goods, his daughter and his wife. Both of the parents died of the black vomit, which struck the ship and took many lives. Now this girl, left alone, appeals to me as one whom her father knew, to stand in a father's place, and the captain, shorn of his crew, asks men to sail his ship to Monterey."

"And she would come to San Fernando?" said Padre Mateo, full of astonishment. "Why doesn't she stay on the ship and return with it to Mexico?"

"Here is her letter," said Father Ignacio, helpless in the demand of this unprecedented business.

"So, there is nothing behind her," said Padre Mateo, having read the letter twice. "Her heart and her hope have been fixed on California; she longs to remain—perhaps there is some useful thing to which she can apply her hand—and there is the captain, who urges marriage and is not a man to be borne, and—here we have Magdalena, who could take her mother's place."

"What? You would counsel bringing her here? No, it is impossible!"

"Somebody is needed to teach the girls needlework," Padre Mateo argued. "Magdalena has no time to instruct them in any more of the domestic arts."

GIVE me the letter again. Let me consider." Padre Ignacio, a man who could not refuse a worthy plea, as Padre Mateo well knew, stood with head bent over the letter, feet wide apart in his spacious gown, lines of concentrated thought gathering on his brow.

"Besides, it will be a difficult thing to bring her here," he said, "with this brigand Alvitre in the bosque by the road. There must be considerable gold in her possession; Jose Sinova was a man of the first."

"Del Valle could send half a dozen soldiers."

"There is not a soldier left at San Fernando to-day." There was a note of resentfulness in Padre Ignacio's voice that drew a glance from his coadjutor so sudden, so sharp, that it seemed to flash like a plowshare in the sun.

"Gone?" said Padre Mateo.

"On one pretext or another," Padre Ignacio replied, spreading his hands to illustrate complete dispersion. "Del Valle has set out for Monterey to make report to the governor, he says; and the remainder have been sent to the pueblo at the request of the *comisionado* there. And you know what Comisionado Felix is."

"A man with red eyes and a disease," said Padre Mateo, succinct in his designation as he was quick in his decision.

"So, what is the peril of a young and comely woman sitting in a cart on a chest of gold?" Padre Ignacio asked it with a grimness of word and feature that seemed to be a definite conclusion of the comely young woman's case.

Padre Mateo turned, hands at his back, to walk a little way apart, chin up, eyes drawn small, in the attitude of a man whose determination leaps all obstacles. He turned back again.

"Del Valle sent his men away out of pique because he could not have his way with the stranger," he said.

"There is no doubt, Brother Mateo."

"Well, let them go. There is a man at hand who is equal to a company of soldiers."

"Such a man at hand?" incredibly, in kindly depreciation of the extravagant declaration.

"Juan Molinero himself," Padre Mateo said, beaming in the discovery of his thought.

"You have advanced well with him, to learn so much, Brother Mateo."

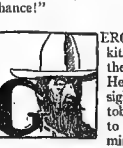
"He has fought the savage Indians in the forests of Kentucky, where one Indian is equal to twenty of our poor simpletons."

"But poor Juan would find Spanish soldiers far different from the naked savages of Kentucky, and let him be sufficient, even so to the task in hand, he dare not quit the bounds of the mission lands. I suspect that Del Valle has men posted in waiting to seize him."

"Give him two pistols," said Padre Mateo, building his plan as if no breath had disturbed it, "and the beautiful long rifle that he carried when he came, and I would trust him to deliver both maiden and gold safely beneath this roof. And there is Cristobal—see him how he stands with admiration in his eyes, looking up into Juan Molinero's face. Ha, there is a friendship already beginning there—see how our tall Juan smiles."

"See him, he gives his hand to the lad, and seems to make himself understood, although there are no words between them," Padre Ignacio marvelled. "Yet there is a way of understanding when man meets man that needs no words; I have marked that many times. Poor Cristobal! I would have spared him to-day, but Geronimo declares he must work, in spite of the stripes on his back that make his shirt bloody. Discipline will fall without a firm hand to uphold it, our brave Geronimo declares."

"Cruelty is another thing," said Padre Mateo. "Ah, here is Geronimo! Unlucky chance!"



GERONIMO came from the kitchen, stooping to pass the low connecting door. He stood a moment at sight of the Indian, Cristobal, idling at his task, to step forward with admirable grace and lightness of foot, a sharp word on his tongue, the lash of his ready whip between his fingers, the thong of it about his wrist.

Cristobal, his back ribbed and cut from the flogging of last night, did not leap away to follow the cart to the vineyard as Don Geronimo expected him to do at the first word. He fell back a step at Don Geronimo's unexpected appearance, where he stood with head up, his face set and immobile, as if he scorned to save himself the lash at the expense of his dignity in the eyes of his new friend. Don Geronimo's eyes twitched at the corners; a smile that seemed the snarl of anticipation moved his beard, baring his small white teeth So he stood, slowly drawing the long lash of his whip, made of rawhide strips finely cut, closely braided and pliant from much use and careful oiling, between finger and thumb of

his left hand, his right grasping the butt, like a fencer poising to bend his blade before throwing himself on guard.

Juan Molinero made a corner of the little triangle formed by the three figures in this quickly assembled scene. He stood about equidistant from Don Geronimo and the Indian, Don Geronimo on his left hand. The lash was now at tip between Don's finger and thumb, the pliant black whip at full stretch in his outspread arms. Don Geronimo lifted himself to tiptoe to whirl the whip, dexterous from long practice in its use.

Juan Molinero stepped in front of the mayordomo as he balanced for the blow, the gleam of his teeth widening in his beard.

"No!" said Juan Molinero, his hand lifted in stern prohibition, his body a barrier before the Indian.

Don Geronimo's face grew white as the plastered wall; he let himself slowly down to his heels; the thong of his lead-weighted whip-butt slipped from his slender wrist. Padre Ignacio came with quick stride between them, pushing them apart.

"He does not understand, Don Geronimo," he said. "He shall be taught that he must not interfere in your discipline."

"Very well," said Don Geronimo, his voice unshaken, although his hand trembled in his thwarted passion as he looped the long whip in his hand. "Let it be made very plain."

"Absolve poor Christobal his fault this morning, if he has been at fault, indeed, Don Geronimo. I will relieve you of him for a day or two; there is a work I have for him to do."

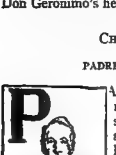
"Take him, then, Padre Ignacio," Don Geronimo yielded.

He turned with what might have passed well for indifference in other eyes, and stepped lightly out to the court, where his saddled horse stood waiting in the sun.

"It is an unfortunate beginning," said Padre Ignacio, sadly. "There is murder in Don Geronimo's heart."

CHAPTER V

PADRE AND FRAY



PADRE MATEO rode his mule in a fashion that seemed to mark him for a belligerent man. He held his legs as stiff as posts in the stirrups, flaring them outward from the animal's sides braced as if he sat ready to ride headlong in a charge at the first alarm, his brown gown pulled high from his shanks, which were marred by scratches from cactus and brier thorn, new and old.

This expedition which centered around a lady was something so strange and extraordinary that he found himself checking his outflying thoughts now and then to ask himself if fancy had not tricked him, and imagination contrived it all. There is no doubt that he smiled quite frequently in the shadow of his broad hat as he rode at his companion's side.

This other was a man garbed in all essentials like Padre Mateo himself, in the brown gown of the Franciscan brotherhood, the flat-crowned black hat with broad brim, the severe cord of hemp about his waist. A mule-drawn cart, its wheels almost the height of a man, came behind the two travelers. It was covered with a weathered canvas, which rested not on bows but upright pieces supporting horizontal braces, making the top square instead of round, after the fashion since the first covered cart rumbled down the long white slopes of Spain. In front of them, scouting the way, Cristobal rode, mounted on a young horse thin-legged and fleet, his lariat coiled at his saddle-horn, his bow and arrows, the only weapons the neophytes were permitted, ready to his hand.

"Well, my good friend, how does the friar's gown feel to you by this time?" Padre Mateo inquired. He tilted his head back to look up into his comrade's face, his mule being two hands lower than the extraordinarily large animal which bore his friend.

"Not much of an outfit for hot weather, especially when a man's got these confounded tight Spanish breeches on under it," Juan Molinero replied. "I tell you, Padre Mateo, if we meet any trouble on the road I think I'll skin out of this long brown sack. I like to have my legs free in a fight."

"No, no, Juan; no, no!" Padre Mateo said, shaking his head solemnly, greatly disturbed by the proposal. "Do as I have cautioned you if we meet soldiers, either on the road or at the Rancho Dominguez, where we shall arrive presently and spend the night. Bend your head a little, as a man in his thoughts, Juan, and pass them by without a word. If it becomes necessary to make explanation of your silence, I will do the talking, my boy. You are a brother of the order, simply *fray*, not *padre*, as many Franciscans are. Remember—silence if we meet soldiers. It will only complicate your situation in this country if you fight, and unluckily kill one of them, Juan."

"Yes, that would be an unlucky go for

me," Juan said, as grave as if the vows of the Franciscans bound him, in truth.

"But if I look as foolish as I feel, the soldiers will see through me like a spy-glass."

"No soldier in the world but would take you for a friar," Padre Mateo declared.

Day seemed to plunge its torch into the sea, the light gave way so quickly to dusk when the sun disappeared behind the low grass-covered hills. They rode on through the twilight, Cristobal growing dim before them. The incense of burning cedar carried faintly to them on the little wind that came rustling like a doe through the chaparral.

"I smell Fabio Dominguez's hearth-fire," Padre Mateo said. "There is the comfort of home-coming in it."

The Dominguez house stood back some distance from the road, on a pleasant smooth hill where pine trees grew, making a fair setting for the low brown house. A high adobe wall enclosed the grounds to fend off the cattle which roamed hill and plain in thousands. At the double gate of solid planks, which Cristobal had opened, Padre Mateo halted, slewed in his saddle and looked hard at Juan Molinero a little while without a word.

"Something cold has come into my heart; I am afraid," he remarked at last.

They rode on to the dooryard, where Dominguez met them, offering the hospitality of his house. Dominguez, in the prime of his vigor, was a dark stocky man, full of words as a sack is full of wheat, for company did not come frequently to his door. He insisted upon having the whole story of their going and their object, nothing of which was kept from him but the identity of the masquerading friar. It was the best piece of news that had come in at the rancher's door in many a day; even the twenty-year-old son listened with a sharpness that seemed to lift him out of his immature character.

"Here is a wife coming for you at last, Guillermo!" his father called to him gaily. A flush deepened on the young man's brown cheeks.

At which the daughter bent her head to hide a smile, and the mischievous banter of her bright brown eyes.

"You shall have Guillermo to go with you, Padre Mateo, if you desire," Dominguez offered. "It is a bad business to travel these roads where every bush hides a thief, with a young lady and her treasure, and only an Indian boy with bow and arrows to stand in defense. It has been shown too often that these bandits have little respect for a priest's gown on the road in these days of affliction."

"It is too true," Padre Mateo agreed, "but I think we shall pass without harm."

"You will have heard that this Sebastian Alvitre robbed two priests from San Juan Capistrano not a week ago?" Dominguez inquired.

"What sort of a man is he?" Juan asked Padre Mateo, lifting his blue eyes from his plate.

"He asks what sort of man this Alvitre is, and I cannot answer him," Padre Mateo said, looking up the table where his host filled the substantial oak armchair in complacent dignity.

"For that matter, neither can I," Dominguez returned. "I have been told that he is of a vile countenance, black as a scorched loaf, but I never have seen him. Let us hope that our meeting with him, one and all of us, is far away."

"And the soldiers went this way to-day?" Padre Mateo inquired. "Can you tell me, Doña, whether they went toward the harbor?"

"They went in that direction," Mrs. Dominguez replied, nodding her sleek black head until the long ear-pendants swung like pendulums against her neck.

"The soldiers are at the harbor," Padre Mateo said, addressing Juan, trouble clouding his hearty face. "Now, Juan, when supper is over you will take the road on a fresh mule that I will procure for you, and dawn will see you safely in San Fernando. It will be a load removed from my conscience and my heart."

Juan was vexed by Padre Mateo's insistence that he make himself safe at the expense of his loyalty to a friend and duty to the expedition that he felt to be as much his own personal affair as that of any other man concerned. A flood of color, as of the rush of a hot retort, came into his face, deepening the fiery coating sun and wind had given the newly shaved portion of it that day. He turned his head slowly and fixed his steady eyes on Padre Mateo's own.

"We settled that business, once and for all, out there at the gate," he said.

"Who sounds on the door?" Dominguez interrupted, starting at the rude knocking, that broke the placidity of his supper hour.

"Shall I inquire, Father?" the young man asked, pushing back to rise.

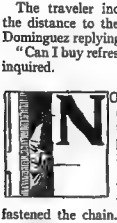
"Again!" said Dominguez, resentful of this rude hand that beat so loudly on his stout oak door. "No; I will go; permit me."

The dining-hall lay at one side of the broad entrance-way, into which it opened through a wide-spanned arch. Dominguez stood for a moment under this arch, grasping the velvet curtain, bending a little, straining in doubtful

pose, as if he questioned the honesty of a man who came at such an hour. In a moment his hand was heard on the chain of the door.

The traveler inquired the direction and the distance to the Pueblo de Los Angeles, Dominguez replying politely as he was asked.

"Can I buy refreshment here?" the traveler inquired.



"NO," said Dominguez, his caution struck down by the challenge to his hospitality. "Enter; this is not a tavern."

The stranger was brief with his thanks; he stood waiting while Dominguez fastened the chain. Dominguez parted the curtains, and the stranger stepped into the light. Juan Molinero and Padre Mateo were seated at the side of the table, their faces toward the arched door, giving them a close view of the stranger as he set foot within the room.

The traveler was of medium stature, heavy in the shoulders with ungraceful strength, like a laborer; a swart man, with rough-modelled features, his face overgrown with the stubble of a thick black beard. His black mustaches were small and bristling, and there was a leering sneer in his countenance, as if he resented his position in human affairs while lacking either the merit to justify advancement at other hands, or the ability to contrive it with his own.

For a traveler who had no more to defend than this man apparently carried about him, the stranger was well armed. In addition to a saber which almost touched the floor, he carried four pistols, two on each side, in holsters attached to the broad belt buckled around his middle over the soiled yellow sash with green stripes, which hung in frayed tassels to his thigh. There was dust on his peaked sombrero, which he kept with ill-mannered boorishness on his head, dust on his embroidered short jacket, and in the creases at the knees of his tight-fitting buff velvet pantaloons, cut so broad at the bottoms as to almost hide his feet strapped beneath his insteps and fastened with silver buckles.

"You are late on the road," said Dominguez.

"It is a habit with me," the other replied.

"Will you sit at the table, gentleman?" Dominguez put his obligation as host above the affront this coarse fellow offered himself, his family and his guests.

He placed a chair beside Juan Molinero, inviting the visitor to sit to his refreshment.

"A man doesn't sit down to the business I have come for, Dominguez," the stranger replied. He snatched a pistol, with the quick movement of a man roused to sudden passion, and presented it at Dominguez's breast. "One little movement and you are with the dead! So, you have not met Sebastian Alvitre? Have a good look at him, then, so you can tell the next slip-foot priest that comes to your door the color of his eyes."

Dominguez stood with shoulders squared, head erect, a little paler for the menace of the pistol, but his dignity was greater than his fear.

"Alvitre, you are a coward, then, as well as a thief, to enter a man's house on this false pretense," Dominguez said.

"That will be enough, little man!" Alvitre warned, his scowl black as the shadow of death. "No, sit in the chair, your hands on the table, boy," he ordered young Dominguez, who had half-risen.

Padre Mateo commanded the young man down with frantic hand, for he could see, as plainly as if the price stood printed on Alvitre's face, the cheap valuation he set on a human life.

"What is this?" Juan Molinero asked, hands on the table-edge as if to rise.

"It is the thief of whom we spoke but a little while ago," Padre Mateo whispered. "God save us now!"

"When you speak nothing good of a man, shut your window, Dominguez, and see that your shutters are closed so tight one little word cannot pass," the outlaw said, making a meaning gesture with his shoulder toward the open casement. "A man might ride on if he heard a kind word fly out, but what is to be expected of priests who make slaves of helpless Indians, and fat farmers who get gifts from the king? So I sound on your door, Dominguez; I step into your house to take from you a thousand dollars. Your wife will bring it to me, while you stand here ready to be killed if one little hair raises on your head."

"I haven't so much money, not a tenth part of it," Dominguez said.

"That is a lie!" Alvitre charged. "You have sold hides and tallow lately. There is money in your chest."

"A little, only a very little," Dominguez protested, whether in truth or in desperate subterfuge perhaps only himself knew.

"In such case I will take the young lady away with me, the young dove that sits yonder. She will do instead of money, if it will please you better, Dominguez."

Young Dominguez leaped to his feet at the threat, laying hold of his heavy chair to strike the outlaw down. A second more and he would have worked his brave intention, but Alvitre, quicker than the youth, drew another pistol with his left hand. Grinning with a coyote snarl he aimed not at young Dominguez, but at the mother of the family, who sat only a little more than the length of his arm from where he stood.

Alvitre stood across the table from Juan Molinero, who sat in his place, hands on the edge of the board, the sleeves of his brown gown wide as grain sacks on his arms. On the outlaw's right hand, two feet or so beyond, the pistol pointed at his breast, Dominguez stood; on his left, the son of the family had crouched down in his chair at the double command of outlaw and priest, where he sat alert and determined, palpitating with wrath which burned in his cheeks and eyes. All this Juan Molinero saw, down to the detail of the lightest breath. Padre Mateo put out a vain hand to stay him as he rose from his place and leaped full into the outlaw's arms.

His brown-clad arms spread as if to embrace Alvitre, the moment before pistol-shots roared and the smoke of the discharge made confusion of the struggle. At the next moment Alvitre was lying insensible on the floor; bits of plaster were falling from the ceiling between the brown cedar beams where the harmless bullets had struck. Juan Molinero was unbuckling sword and pistols from the outlaw's body, one substantial foot in its broad sandal set on the prostrate form to hold the bandit helpless.

Dominguez shouted to the others to put out the lights for fear Alvitre's men might fire through the window. The candles on the table were blown out in a breath; mother and daughter sprang to puff out the others which stood on the sideboard across the room.

"Leave one candle burning till we bind him fast for the soldiers!" Padre Mateo called, his voice strong and loud.

"He will be held, never doubt," Dominguez panted, his knees on Alvitre's shoulders where he lay, face to the floor.

Juan Molinero fastened the outlaw's pistol belt around him, and took the saber in his hand.

"I'll see to the others," he said to Padre Mateo.

"God speed you, my son!" Padre Mateo replied. "Here," jerking off the hemp rope that was his girdle, holding it out to Dominguez, "this will hold him—bind him well."

Dominguez made a quick loop of the stout rope around Alvitre's arm, then leaned over, reaching for the other one; Juan Molinero was at the door, the sharp clink of the heavy chain in their ears. And Sebastian Alvitre, fox that had scorned and beaten the traps of many men, leaped to his feet, flinging those who clung to him aside as a man in the harvest flings sheaves of wheat. A spring, and he was on the low sill of the open window; a leap through the unfastened shutter, and he was gone in the dark.

Dominguez shouted; the last candle was blown out. They stood waiting, silent, expectant. Juan Molinero returned after a little while, to find them scarcely breathing in the dark house, where Dominguez had drawn them out of the range of windows behind his thick adobe walls.

"He was alone," Juan reported. "All I got was his horse. He slipped past me in the bushes."

Dominguez made a light, and exclaimed in amazement, as he lifted his candle high.

"What is this?" he asked, turning in astonishment to Padre Mateo. "A monk went out, a cavalier returns! God save us! What is this?"

For Juan Molinero stood revealed in the short jacket and tight pantaloons which his long gown had hidden, Sebastian Alvitre's pistols strapped around him, the robber's sabre at his side. Close at his heels the young Indian, Cristobal, was standing, a gleam of white teeth in his dark face, the long brown gown across his arm.

"I stripped it off, Padre Mateo, so I'd be free in case of a fight," said Juan.

CHAPTER VI

NOT FOR GUILLERMO

DOMINGUEZ had waited at his gate all day, ever since Padre Mateo and his patry left his house early in the morning. His pistols were in his belt, his gun on his shoulder, for he expected and feared that Alvitre would return as soon as Padre Mateo and his valiant companion took the road, to revenge the humiliation he had suffered in that house.

The rancher had watched this bright-haired stranger ride away on Sebastian Alvitre's famous horse, his brown monk's gown tied to the cantle of his saddle. No amount of argument, protestation or entreaty on Padre Mateo's part had been enough to induce him

to envelop his limbs in the disguise again. Dominguez did not understand a word of his reply to Padre Mateo, but his bearing and his manner seemed easily interpreted. In effect, the disguise would appear a coward's subterfuge, something that men might say was put on because he feared to meet Alvitre by day.

Padre Mateo's company returned from the Pueblo de Los Angeles when the sun was resting its rim on the tiles of Dominguez's house. The young woman on whose account this expedition had been made alighted from the covered cart when it came to a stand under the pine trees near the door.

At first sight Dominguez was disappointed in her. He found her lacking in the voluptuousness of figure, the sprightly vivaciousness of face, which he accounted beauty in a woman. True, she came down out of the cart with a spring in her step and no fear of breaking her leg when she landed. Dominguez liked her for that. She was nimble and slim and fair, even fair of hair like an Andalusian, with brown eyes of a softness that fine chamois skin is to the hand. Dominguez liked her very well for that. She was thin, according to Dominguez's thought of what a woman should be, almost as flat of bosom as Guillermo himself——and she was twenty-five if she was a day. For this Dominguez did not like her at all.

"She will not do for Guillermo," he said to the priest as the guest entered the door, speaking with great politeness behind his hand, regretful that the exigency demanded the warning. "It must not be encouraged."

"Nothing is so far from her thought as a husband," Padre Mateo replied. "Her first confidence to me was that she wanted to become a nun. But that, of course, cannot be. There are no convents, no nuns, in California. Poor Gertrudis! I think she will have to marry somebody, in the end."

"Dona Magdalena will be a mother to her at the mission, and Don Geronimo a second father," Dominguez said. "She is going to a life as serene as if she had become the bride of Our Senor, indeed, but what use a poor pale thing like that will be to you there I cannot imagine. She looks as if she lived on the white of eggs."

"There is great endurance, and great souls, very often, in bodies that seem frail."

"It is true," Dominguez nodded, his eyes speculative, pipe in his hand.

Guillermo rose. His mother was in the door, daughter and guest dimly white behind her. The three came into the patio, where palms grew along the wall, and flowers which the hands of Dona Ana had brought to the perfection of bloom. The scent of lemon and jasmine blossoms blent in the slow night wind, the benediction of placid domesticity.

"The land is sweet after the wild and bitter sea," said Gertrudis Sinova, standing to breathe such perfumes as chemist never blended, her arms lifted a little, her hands outspread. "There is security here; there is peace."

"If no prowling bandit comes," said Dona Ana, her voice low in dreadful caution.

"Little fear to-night, dona," Padre Mateo assured her, so calm and contented himself that his confidence spread round him like a light.

"Where is the tall American with the shining hair?" she asked.

"He is standing sentinel, in the hope, I truly believe, that Sebastian Alvitre, the bandit, will come again to-night," Padre Mateo answered.

"In the hope?" Gertrudis repeated, incredible that she had understood.

"He is dissatisfied with the fiasco we made of it when he left Alvitre in our hands for a moment," Padre Mateo replied, a little laugh at his own disgrace in his words. "Yes, if Alvitre shows his head to-night it will be a long time before he runs away again."

She would have from Padre Mateo's tongue the story of Juan Molinero, of his coming to the kitchen door at San Fernando in the night, clothed in the skins of wild beasts, bearded like a patriarch; his long hair on his shoulders. She exclaimed in resentful wonder to hear that his life was forfeit under the king's decree which closed California to foreign feet, she protested like a defender of the oppressed when told of Captain del Valle's demand for his surrender on the charge that he was a spy.

"What romance! what a figure for romantic adventure! He is like Alvarado of the Noche Triste, another gallant gentleman with golden hair."

Her ardent sympathy, expressed in voice tuneful on the ear as the scented breeze was pleasant to breathe, was sweet in the ears of Padre Mateo. As for Guillermo, his father's disappointment in this young woman was not his own. Guillermo's thoughts were with his desires, and they were not in the patio that night. There was another, perhaps thought unworthy for a son of a family, with sloe lids over long-slitted eyes; a soldier's daughter in the pueblo, whose smile through her barred window had made his heart faint with ecstacy, his knees weak in the sickness of a so sweet malady.

"It is secure, it is safe, knowing that the American gentleman is on guard this night,"

said Gertrudis, so softly that the words must have been meant for her own heart alone.

"Ah!" said Padre Mateo to himself, nodding his wise head in the dark. "The judgment of youth is quick and sure, world without end."

"But if the soldiers take him, then he must die!" she said, her words quick, sharp, as if only at that moment the man's peril had been revealed to her without the splendor of romance.

"That is the fear that walks with me," Padre Mateo confessed. "I led him into the danger, but I urged him to return while he could have done so in safety. He scorned the thought."

"Certainly! I would—anybody who had looked him in the eyes would have known he wouldn't go back. And tomorrow!" her fear leaped into her words, quickening them, giving them a panting anxiety. "If the soldiers meet us tomorrow!"

"Then Juan Molinero will find a way," Padre Mateo declared confidently.

CHAPTER VII

A BULLET IN THE WALL

PADRE MATEO had them on the road while the morning was still wan. A gray fog made day delinquent; it trickled in a cold sweat from every roadside shrub; it marked the ridges of wheel-tracks in the dust with little tracings of moisture, and drew its magic circle with delicate touch around each footprint of creature that had passed the dusty highway the day before.

"It is a good morning for my lima beans," Dominguez said when he parted with them at the gate, "but I would wait for the sun before taking the road. That rascal Alvitre could stand behind a bush and never be seen till you were on top of him."

The chance was as great by sun as in fog, Padre Mateo replied, and rode forth in confidence. Cristobal was in the lead, his quick ears strained for an unfriendly sound, as ready now to shoot an arrow through Sebastian Alvitre as any other thief. Alvitre was in the dust; a new hero stood in the young Indian's eyes. There was a big hope in his heart that morning to do some brave deed in the presence of the mighty man who had held Sebastian Alvitre as helpless as a little child and taken away his pistols and his sword.

Padre Mateo and Juan Molinero rode behind the cart, in which Gertrudis Sinova sat on a pile of blankets, her possessions about her. Which of her boxes, if any, contained the gold she was believed to have inherited, Juan did not know. Against the advice of Padre Mateo she had tucked the canvas cover of the cart aside, to give her a view of the new land that was to be home, she said.

Juan thought she appeared very frail and oppressed by sorrow, her face white as a summer cloud under the dark scarf drawn over her head, her large cloak concealing her figure as she swayed in the jolting cart. Her gentle eyes, too sad to seem eager, watched the narrow winding road ahead, through the opening at the cart's end, wonderingly, expectantly, with a great loneliness that struck his heart like a pain. Sometimes, when her eyes met his, she smiled.

Padre Mateo's mule-bell was stuffed with leaves to keep it dumb on its neck-strap. He himself was oppressed by forty fears. His sandalled feet did not flare out so gallantly from his mule's sides, his shoulders drooped under the burden of the sun. He turned his eyes this way and that, in constant watching, thinking to see Sebastian Alvitre spring from the bushes, red-eyed from a long vigil by the roadside. There was no assurance in Juan's pistols, nor the rifle in the cart where Juan could lean and reach it. A man with twenty bullets in him could not stand to the defense of the helpless girl. But if it came to the point where he must do it, Padre Mateo was determined that he would show the bandit crew that, although a priest was prohibited by the king's commands from bearing arms of his own, he was under no interdiction that bound his hands from applying the weapons of another man to the defense of a helpless woman in his care. Padre Mateo calculated the effectiveness of the barricade formed by the boxes in the cart.

"Tula," said he, giving her the affectionate diminutive of her name, "can you fire a pistol?"

"As well as almost any man," she replied, with sidelong look at Juan, as if she made her exception there.

"Then I am going to ask Juan to give you one of his, or perhaps two. No man can use six pistols, no matter if he's as quick as powder. If this fellow Alvitre should happen to appear—although I do not look for him at all, my dear; the road is quite safe—it would be well to be able to show him his place."

Juan was pleased with the suggestion. He selected one of the weapons brought from the mission, a new pattern of weapon with four revolving barrels.

"These pistols of yours, Padre Mateo, are

better than Alvitre's," Juan said. "For a man of his name, he's away behind the times."

Padre Mateo kicked his mule close to the tail of the cart and put the weapon in Gertrudis's hand.

"God forbid that you ever need it!" he said. "But there is a proverb which says that the wise man does first what the fool does last. It is well to be prepared. No, my boy," speaking to Juan, ranging beside him again, more comfortable in his mind. "it is not such an easy thing to get good weapons in this country. Alvitre, I have no doubt, is nearly as badly crippled to-day as though you had cut off one of his hands."

Whether Sebastian Alvitre was indeed crippled for the want of pistols, or whether his humiliation had so debased him in the eyes of his followers that they were afraid to engage in any further enterprises under his lead, Padre Mateo, of course never learned. But he was relieved to reach the pass in the hills at noonday without sight of the outlaw.

The travelers came in peace to San Fernando when the sun was low, and the burning wind from the desert was falling to intermittent gusts. Here the king's highway divided the mission estate, the buildings lying to the right of it, a broad field enclosed by a high adobe wall on the left. In the center of this field two palm trees stood, aliens on that land, set there by the fathers who founded the mission, the little plants carried from Mexico with tender care.

Juan Molinero was to remember long that day's journey and that home-coming. To the end of his life a whiff of dust rising from the road, a glimpse of a tiled roof through the greenery of boughs, brought back to him in a rush the recollection of that day: Gertrudis in the cart, her cloak and scarf aside, her fair hair lifting in the wind, and now and then her smile of confidence, the only language between them that they could understand.

The thirsty mules quickened their listless pace, scenting the water of the fountain across the road from the mission's white arcade. Gertrudis stood on her knees, looking over the driver's shoulder to see what waited her in the land that had cost her so much in bereavement and sorrow to reach.

Before the mission the road was broad and white, trampled to its very edges by feet of men and beasts. The Indian neophytes were coming home from the fields, their day's work done, streaming across this wide white road with hoes and scythes on their shoulders. Some of them waved their hands in greeting to Cristobal as he approached the fountain, riding a few rods ahead of the cart. A little way beyond this procession of oncoming laborers the road bent sharply around the corner of the high adobe wall that enclosed the padres' garden.

The mules drawing the cart stretched their necks with sudden yielding to their thirst, and swerved wilfully toward the fountain, defying the driver, who sawed with all his might on the bits, carrying the young lady across the road from the spot where Padre Ignacio stood under the white arches to welcome her. The Indian laborers paused a moment in their homeward march to laugh at the driver's helpless anger against the mules, which he relieved a little now by lashing their dusty backs with his whip as they stood with muzzles buried to the nostrils, sucking the cool water of the fountain.

"It will do," said Padre Mateo, seeing that it must do. "Drive across when they have enough. No, Gertrudis, do not get down; there is dust enough here to swallow you. One moment now."

"Here is the pistol," she said, offering it at large, it seemed, standing with it in her hand.

Padre Mateo waved Juan forward to receive it back from her, which he did with a surge of color to his face, his hat in his hand. He put the pistol in the saddle hostler that carried its mate, flinging over them the brown gown that he had worn yesterday.

"Thank God for the peaceful conclusion of this day!" said Padre Mateo. "Juan, keep a close eye on that horse to see that Alvitre doesn't steal him from you. The rascal will go to no end of trouble to get him back again, you may——"

QUICK, Juan, quick! Soldiers!"

It was Cristobal, shouting at a pitch of excitement that cracked his voice and made it squeal like a girl's. He stood at the fountain, pointing. Troopers were rounding the turn in the road at the corner of the garden wall.

The neophytes cleared out of the way, some dropping their tools in their haste to give free passage to the men whose contempt and cruelty made them a daily scourge. Padre Mateo kicked his mule frantically, reining it in front of the soldiers who came sweeping down the road like a boisterous wind, their dust heavy behind them.

"Ride! I will stand between!" he shouted to Juan.

Juan turned his horse to face the troopers,

as if he had a thought of riding through their line instead of showing them his back in flight. The reins lay loose across the saddle-horn; his hands were under the brown gown where the four-barreled pistols hung. Padre Ignacio had started down from the arcade when the soldiers closed around Juan, Captain del Valle within the circle, saber in his hand. The officer made an imperious gesture which seemed to sweep Juan from his horse.

"Down! You are a prisoner in the king's name!"

"So, this is the trick you play? Worse than liar!" Padre Mateo scorned the soldier. "You hide beyond the wall——"

"It is enough!" Captain del Valle said. "Down!" he commanded again, lunging with his sword to make his meaning plain, the point of it not an inch from Juan Molinero's breast. A moment, and the sword-point wavered, sank down; the blood fled out of the captain's face. Juan Molinero was leveling the four-barreled pistols at the captain's head.

"Tell him to order his men to retire," Juan requested Padre Mateo.

"There must be no violence! In the name of Our Senor I forbid him to fire! Stop him, Brother Mateo." Padre Ignacio came hurriedly among the horses as he spoke, his sandalled feet noiseless in the dust.

Juan said nothing, nor hesitated a moment when Padre Mateo translated his superior's command. He restored the pistols to the holster instantly, and sat defenseless in the face of eight soldiers and their captain, his hands on his thighs.

"Now," said Padre Ignacio, greatly relieved and pleased, "permit him to pass, Captain del Valle."

"He is the king's prisoner, and no longer at my disposal," Captain del Valle ungraciously returned.

"Have you no more gratitude, no greater magnanimity, for the man who gives you your life?" Padre Ignacio sternly demanded.

Captain del Valle had exchanged sword for pistol, which he presented at Juan's breast. The soldiers had followed their captain's lead; Juan was the center of their concentrated aim. His obedience had cost him his hope.

"Tell him to dismount," the captain ordered Padre Mateo.

Juan obeyed, confident that the authoritative voice, the commanding presence, of Padre Ignacio would be at once his defense and deliverance.

"Bind him," Captain del Valle commanded, designating two soldiers for that duty.

Padre Ignacio stepped to Juan's side, lifting an interdicting hand.

"Let no man touch him on pain of denial of the holy communion," he said.

Captain del Valle threw himself from the saddle as the soldiers drew back, quaking between the fear of the awful punishment threatened by the priest and the wrath of their officer.

"You cannot stand between the law and this spy," the Captain said roughly, approaching as if he would fling the priest aside. "He has been at the harbor spying out a way for ten thousand of these new Americans to enter this land. You do not know, here behind your thick walls, what is going on in the world, Padre Ignacio. This man must be taken to Monterey for trial. Priest or layman will stand in the way of it at his peril. It is enough."

"If you were an honest man you would not bend to this poor trick," Padre Mateo said, pushing his mule forward between Captain del Valle and Padre Ignacio, crowding the beast with such impertinence into the little space that its dusty neck rubbed the soldier's coat. "You could have come on the open road to arrest this inoffensive stranger; you knew where he would pass. But no; you must do it here, at the very door of the mission, to defy and humiliate Padre Ignacio, to work your mean spite against him in this manner, worm of a soldier that you are!"

"Bind him!" Captain del Valle commanded his men, a threat of terrible discipline in his scowl.

"Let me plead for him, brave Captain," Gertrudis appealed, standing pale and wistful in the cart's end.

"It cannot be, miss, or madam," Captain del Valle replied. His pistol was pointed at Juan Molinero's heart; the soldiers, trembling white and cold with fear, came forward with ropes to bind the prisoner's hands.

"There is no harm in him; he is gentle in word and thought," Gertrudis pleaded, "and only two nights past he grappled an armed outlaw with his bare hands when he threatened the lives of a citizen and his family. See—that is the outlaw's horse; his pistols are here, in this gallant gentleman's belt."

"It is nothing to me, lady," Captain del Valle said.

"But you—he spared you——"

"Ha! God save her! She falls!" Padre Ignacio cried, leaping in vain endeavor to assist Gertrudis who, in her earnestness seeming to forget where she stood, had stepped from the cart-end and fallen to the ground.

She lay as if insensible, her cheek in the dust, her hair spread around, one hand thrown out as if to break her fall.

"Lift her, my son—she lies as one dead," Padre Ignacio said, interpreting his meaning by speaking gestures.

Juan, disregarding Captain del Valle's menacing pistol, bent and lifted her in his arms.

"Into the cart with her, leave her so!" Captain del Valle ordered.

Gertrudis opened her eyes with an appealing look into Juan Molinero's face.

"My knee—it is terrible, the agony!" she moaned. "Carry me within—quickly, quickly!"

Juan understood only the appeal of her eyes, the suffering expression of her white face against his arm, but he knew that Captain del Valle had ordered her thrown into the cart like a sheep. That was no place for a suffering woman when the mission door stood wide.

"Across the road with you now, John Miller!" Padre Mateo shouted, kicking his mule in front of Captain del Valle as if the soldier were a bush, the pistol in his hand of no more importance than a thorn.

There was a trampling of feet, a dismounting in haste of soldiers at the captain's command, confusion and blinding dust. Padre Mateo, his feet flaring wide in the stirrups, shifted his mule in a clever dance to block Captain del Valle's aim, and Juan Molinero pushed the doubtful soldiers out of his way and set off with his burden across the road toward the mission door.

"Halt!" Captain del Valle shouted. "Fire! Shoot him down!"

Padre Ignacio stood before the hesitant soldiers, his arms spread wide as if to gather the charges of their half-raised muskets to his own breast. Captain del Valle, desperately furious, laid hold of Padre Mateo's bridle reins, wrenching the capering mule to a sudden stand. He leveled his pistol across the animal's back, at Padre Mateo's cantle, and fired as the wrathful priest laid him a lusty blow across the mouth with the back of his open hand.

"You would kill a woman, beast!" Padre Mateo cried.

Padre Mateo's blow sent the pistol-ball high over Juan Molinero's head. For many years after that day the Indians pointed to a dark spot in the white plaster covering the mission's adobe walls, close by a little barred window that let the south sun into Padre Ignacio's chamber. Before Captain del Valle could draw another pistol, Juan had leaped up the three steps leading to the areade and crossed to the open door.

MAGDALENA, waiting within to welcome the guest who was to become her special care, who had seen Juan's arrest and deliverance, was amazed when Gertrudis leaped out of Juan's arms as they crossed the threshold, as nimbly as if she never had been touched by as much as a falling leaf in her life. In a moment she was running back the way that Juan had carried her, to meet Padre Ignacio, who stood in amazement in the middle of the dusty road. There the girl flung herself on her knees before the priest, who spread his hands over her bowed head in the benediction that she sought.

"It is a miracle!" said Padre Mateo.

He leaned back in his saddle and laughed until his brown gown shook.

"It is a trick that you shall pay for, by the holy wood!" Captain del Valle swore.

There was blood on his beard as he looked up into the priest's face, his eyes luminious with the hate that inflamed him. He drew his hand across his mouth, and held it out with its stain for Padre Mateo to see, sternly, as if he laid before him proof of an offense so deep that only blood itself could balance it.

Magdalena stood in the door, a barring arm stretched before Juan, who seemed to protest that honor demanded of him to return to the soldiers from whom he had escaped by the artful pretense of this admirable girl. Magdalena understood that one word *honor*, for the sound of it in the Castilian tongue is similar. She placed her palm against Juan's breast and pushed him away from the door as she might have repelled an insistent child.

"No, no!" she said, sternly. "Honor goes to honor, Juan Molinero. Remain where you are."

Padre Mateo sat a moment in his saddle, his head bent, the mirth gone out of his hearty face. He looked then at Captain del Valle, whose swollen lips twitched his beard.

"Captain del Valle, I did not strike you; I struck only your unworthy passion. Thank me; I saved you, perhaps, from the curse of innocent blood. It is folly to carry the thought of vengeance against a priest who has neither property to be taken away nor ambitions to be denied."

Padre Mateo rode away in dignity and left the soldier with that. Captain del Valle mounted his horse and turned toward the north, this time with no pretense in his going to report to the governor in the capital city of Monterey.

CHAPTER VIII

INCREDIBLE NEWS

ON GERONIMO sat at supper with Sergeant Olivera in the mission kitchen, as on another night more than two months before. The long whip was hanging in its place beside the door, the hams and bacon were dim in the slow-moving smoke among the dark beams.

"It is incredible news you bring, Sergeant Olivera," Don Geronimo said, his grizzly thick eyebrows lifted until they arched high in his lofty forehead. "Sebastian Alvitre given full pardon by the governor, and to become an honest tavern-keeper in the pueblo! It passes the belief of a credulous man."

"How honest a tavern-keeper is another thing, but a tavern-keeper, in all sobriety. As to the governor's motives, Don Geronimo, you will pardon my silence."

"Certainly, Sergeant Olivera. A soldier's tongue must wear a bridle. As for myself, I can see nothing in the whole business but the beginning of some new rascality."

"We shall see," said the sergeant, his leathery face as secret as a closed purse.

Borromeo Cambon appeared out of the night, pausing a moment in the door to make a heavy ceremonial bow to Magdalena, who laughed and applauded the effort with clapping hands. Borromeo was arrayed as for an occasion, with gilt-braided green jacket and buff pantaloons so tight on his big thighs that the skin itself must have been crowded. These were buckled under his insteps, making it appear a question, and a disconcerting one, how the blacksmith was to sit down.

"Well, soldier!" Borromeo hailed in booming voice, coming in with a swagger to his broad shoulders, putting out his hand in greeting, "Where have you been since I drank the last cup with you at this table more than eight weeks ago?"

"I have been in the south," the sergeant replied, rising to meet the hearty fellow on equal terms. "And where is the barbarian? Has he put on his hairy skins and gone back to his kind?"

"He is sitting by a candle, a book under his nose, spelling out large words which he will try to pronounce to me to-morrow," Borromeo laughed. "He is a savage no longer, my brave soldier."

"No? It is a miracle," the soldier said, amusement, depreciation, in his words.

"Now, I will tell you, gentlemen," said Borromeo, puffing after a tremendous swig at the earthen mug that held his quart of sour claret, "I believe he is as true a man and as worthy a Christian as ever put beans in his mouth. That much I will say for Juan Molinero, who has worked by my side in the forge many a good day."

"What of the mill, Don Geronimo, that this stranger was to build for Padre Ignacio? Does it go?" Sergeant Olivera made the inquiry in light derisiveness, as a man speaks of another's ridiculous simplicity to one who has borne the affliction of it, certain that he has pitched his tune to a sympathetic ear.

"It goes," Don Geronimo replied without enthusiasm, grudgingly, as the flatness of his voice betrayed. "There is a devilish ingenuity in the hand of that man. What calamities his innovations shall bring to this mission I shrink to contemplate."

"Calamities?" Sergeant Olivera repeated the word curiously, as a man turns, with puzzled face a thing that he does not understand.

"Saving labor to these Indians is not wise," Don Geronimo answered gloomily. "They see the water doing their work in one thing; presently they will demand that the water do it in all things. No, the millstones with the sweep were better than this arrangement. I do not care if the stranger's mill grinds ten times as much."

"And it goes?" said Sergeant Olivera, keenly curious, leaning a little in his eagerness to learn more.

"I will tell you how Don Juan and I made the machinery that turns this mill with such marvelous ease," Borromeo interposed, assuming an undertaking which Don Geronimo willingly yielded to his forward tongue. "With your permission, Don Geronimo," he amended, seeing the corner of Magdalena's eye.

"Speak until you are empty, Borromeo," Don Geronimo granted.

"I am listening," Sergeant Olivera said.

"Then it was this way we accomplished it against the belief of all men but Padre Ignacio," Borromeo began. He stretched his legs under the table, and leaned back at elegant ease, one arm hooked over the chair-post one free to emphasize and illustrate his points. "In the beginning, Don Juan came to me to inquire if I had a furnace for melting iron. He was not surprised when I showed him the little melting-pot that I had made of clay, for running metal to cast many little things which save me long hammering at the anvil. He saw at once that I was a crafts man who knew metal from the very ore That made it simple for him; half the work was already done.

"Then this Don Juan shapes a model of parts out of wood, his cog-wheels and his stems. We pack dry sand around them, and withdraw them with care, leaving the impression, the form. But when I pour in the metal, there is a disturbance, for the sand is not just so dry. So, this first casting is not good. Again, and again, many times we try, until at last it comes perfect from the mold. A bevel gear, Don Juan calls it."

"A bevel gear," Sergeant Olivera repeated, thoughtfully. "But it is nothing new in mechanics, Don Geronimo?"

"Not at all; but new to the simple padres, applied for the first time in California. We have two burr-stones turned by the contrivance; I grant that it is a labor-saving machine, which is all this American thinks of—saving human energy, the most plentiful and the cheapest thing in the world."

"That is not all that Don Juan has accomplished," Borromeo said with pride. "He has shown us how oxen are yoked in America, with the yoke resting on the necks close against the shoulders, in place of being tied to the horns, as we do it, as it has been done in Spain for ten thousand years."

"Oh, not so long, Borromeo," Magdalena protested. "The world has not been created so long as that."

"Well, as long as it has been made, then," Borromeo insisted.

"I do not see the advantage of the new method," Sergeant Olivera said, considering it for its merits with unprejudiced mind. "It may be more comfortable for the beasts, if any man is such a fool as to devise arrangements for that."

"An ox is like a man, take him as you will," said Borromeo. "Give him comfort and he works with spirit. And that is one thing. Another thing is that one span of oxen will draw a load as heavy as three span yoked in the old way. And that is something else, heh?"

"It is something to consider," Sergeant Olivera admitted, honestly interested in what he had heard.

"And Don Juan has made a plow that throws a furrow like a wave, a great wide plow with one turning-side to it, not like the iron-shod beam that has been used in Spain for eight——"

"Hundred," Magdalena prompted.

"Too long, even at that," Borromeo complained. "We knew no better until Don Juan proved what his plow could do. It will increase the yield of our fields; it will throw up the diabolical worms that eat the roots of our plants to perish in the sun."

"I must see this plow," Sergeant Olivera said.

"I am making another one now, after the pattern of the first; I shall make many more. You are welcome to come to the forge tomorrow and learn the ways of progressive men, so that when you have the ranch you spoke of at our first meeting, you will know where to come for an implement."

"Just so," the soldier said, nodding seriously.

"Yes, Don Juan is a marvelous man; he is like a brother to me," Borromeo declared. "He knows the name of every tool in the forge, he can talk enough Castilian already for daily use, more than many of these neophytes who have had it beaten into them for twenty years."

"That is no marvel of intelligence," Don Geronimo said, cold in the heat of all this praise, which Sergeant Olivera knew very well was distasteful to him as a bitter pill. "Castilian is the natural language of man; it is the speech that God put into Adam's mouth at the beginning."

"Does he sit at this table?" the soldier inquired.

"No. Padre Ignacio has him at table, with Padre Mateo and the guests," Don Geronimo replied.

"It is like a family; they are the same as son and daughter to Padre Ignacio," Magdalena said.

"This is interesting," Sergeant Olivera assured them, rising to take his leave. "With your permission, Dona Magdalena, Don Geronimo, I shall go to my repose. To-morrow I leave you again, to return to the mission no more, except only as a friend to see his friends."

"What is this?" Don Geronimo asked, his face turning pale.

"My captain has returned from Monterey with orders to establish the military forces in the Pueblo de Los Angeles, withdrawing the troopers from this mission and the Mission San Gabriel."

Don Geronimo bent his head, and stood a little while in silence, as a man stands to collect himself when he has heard heavy news.

"It is the beginning of the end," he said. "The pueblos will be built at the sacrifice of the missions. That is the mistaken policy of the viceroy, urged on by politicians who wait to pick our bones."

Don Geronimo went with the soldier to the door, where he stood looking into the night. Magdalena knew by the turn of his head that he was facing toward the village where the Indians lived. What thoughts,

what fears, were crowding into his mind that moment she could not know, but a terrible cloud of menace and unrestrained passion rose in her own vision, making her eyes big as if she looked on unspeakable things. There was hatred and smoldering vengeance laid up against Don Geronimo in the brown huts of the clustered village, where many a back was sore that night from the bite of the long black whip that hung beside the door.

CHAPTER IX

SEBASTIAN ALVITRE AGAIN

JUAN MOLINERO, for one, was glad to see the soldiers quit San Fernando, where eight of them, under command of a corporal, had been stationed since the day he returned to his sanctuary from the trip to the harbor. Padre Mateo had told Juan a thing about these military men that did not lift them an inch in the American's respect. No Spanish ship had come to California in three years past; the Viceroy of Mexico had ceased sending money to pay the soldiers in the presidios and missions of Alta California. The New Spain was becoming a stranger to the old; bold talk of separation, bold plots of uprisings to form a nation apart, were carried forward in the light of day.

The Governor of California had appealed to the missions for gold to pay the soldiers, many of whom, stationed at the presidios, were in hardship, their wives and children in necessitous want. This appeal, out of gratitude for past protection and assistance, was gladly met. It was so generously and promptly met, in truth, that the governor and the military men were surprised. They had found the key to the treasure-boxes of the missions, upon which they had fixed their covetous eyes so long.

From the first respectful, doubtful appeal it was only a step to another. It became, in modern expression, a graft, this preying on the mission treasure, and it had become a tremendous drain on the mission's treasury, for the requirements of the beneficiaries grew, while their respect gave way to insolence, their supplication to unfeigned demand. The missions could not carry the load without falling soon into a state of exhaustion. A check was called; the golden stream was suddenly and inexorably checked. This happened about the time of Juan Molinero's arrival at San Fernando. The withdrawal of the soldiers from the missions now was part of a plan of coercion to open the golden arteries again.

Padre Mateo talked of this as he stood with Juan Molinero in the mill the morning after Sergeant Olivera's visit to the kitchen. Inside the shed that housed the simple machinery of the mill there was the pleasant smell of flint on flint as the millstones spun, warm streams of flour pouring into the bins in bountiful cascades.

The miller was an old Mexican whose hair was almost as white as the flour, one who had come a young man to the mission of San Diego de Acalá, and had followed Padre Serra, founder of the missions, into the north. The marvel of this admirable mill was over him like the effect of a miracle. In the most prolific year of all the many years that he had fed the hoppers of mills driven by Indians tramping a wearisome circle at the end of a sweep, he had not ground as much wheat as he had turned into flour these past two months.

"So they are gone," said Padre Mateo, looking from the door of the mill toward the lumpy-backed low mountain that marked from a distance the point where the pass led into the valley of San Gabriel and the Pueblo de Los Angeles. "I, for one, have neither fears for the future nor tears for the present. The air seems sweeter to me this morning for having those gaming, drinking, dishonest fellows out of it. Let us hope that the road will be a long one that brings the next soldier here."

"I'll be able to cross the road, at any rate, without the risk of needing a young lady to scheme some plan to get me back," said Juan. "I've been wanting to see that big field with the two palms in it for a long time."

"You have been patient under the restrictions that have set bounds for your restless feet, my son," Padre Mateo commended him. "Padre Ignacio has taken the matter up with our college of San Fernando, in Mexico. An appeal will be made to the viceroy for exemption in your case. When it comes, you may pass from one end of California to the other, the equal of any man."

"They'll find a way to deny you, Padre Mateo. I'm convinced that if I'm to save my neck I've got to risk the dangers that lie between here and Kentucky. They're bound to get me in time, if I stay here—I can't live on your charity forever—while I have a strong chance of escaping the Yumas, and the tribes east of them, if I'm watchful as I go along."

"It is not a question of bounty on your part, Juan, but one of the deepest gratitude for benefits conferred. You have helped us

forward fifty years. What you might do, for us, for yourself, by remaining in California and becoming a citizen, is inspiring to contemplate."

"Padre Ignacio is coming, bringing some buyers for flour," Juan announced, breaking abruptly the thread of their not-too-happy discourse.

"So?" Padre Mateo made his eyes small, looking against the sun to see. "I doubt if these men are customers, Juan," he speculated, watching them narrowly. I see Vincente Felix, *Comisionado* of Los Angeles, in the lead. He is not a man to buy flour."

"Isn't there another one you recognize?" Juan asked, a curious expression in his frank blue eyes.

"No-o-o," Padre Mateo deliberated.

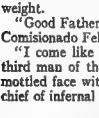
"Not that I know him, Padre, but we have met. If I am not greatly mistaken, it is Sebastian Alvitre."

"So it is! Late brigand, now a citizen of parts, but a rascal in any guise. It is no good wind that blows such geese as these to our water."

Padre Ignacio halted a little way from the door of the mill, waiting for the lagging trio to overtake him. They came up to him red and sweating, short-winded and puffing, for it was a hot morning and they were men of weight.

"Good Father, you can outwalk a horse!" Comisionado Felix declared.

"I come like a tortoise behind you," the third man of the party laughed, wiping his mottled face with an immense silk handkerchief of infernal hues.



EBASTIAN ALVITRE made no comment. He had come up short, like a man running against a wall in the dark, on seeing Padre Mateo and Juan beside the door.

"Brother Mateo, Comisionado Felix, of the pueblo, you know," Father Ignacio said, indicating that person with graceful turning of the hand. "This is Manuel Roja, citizen of the town, and this Mr. Alvitre, who lately established himself in an inn on the plaza there."

"Whom I have met, under circumstances not so tranquil as the present," Padre Mateo said, giving Alvitre a bold, accusing look.

"Comisionado Felix has led this delegation from the pueblo to investigate our mill, Brother Mateo," Padre Ignacio explained.

"You consider building one?" Padre Mateo inquired, turning to the *comisionado*.

The *comisionado* was a man who seemed enlarged to a disgusting puffiness by the virus of some festering complaint, evident in the pustules and pits which marred his face. His lashless eyelids were red-rimmed, his beardless lips purple from the congestion of much wine. He spread his hands, drew his mouth in grimace expressive of complete disclaimer, at Padre Mateo's question.

"Far from it," he replied. "As it is, we have scarcely enough water to drink, and keep our cattle and goats alive, to say nothing at all of our trees and little gardens of beans, which perish where they stand."

"They complain that we are taking the water out of the river, robbing them to propel our millstones," Padre Ignacio explained, with the patience of a just man, however ill-founded he knew the charge to be.

"It requires more water to drive two stones than one," said the little fat fellow called Roja, whose sharp eyes had been exploring the interior of the mill.

"That is true," Padre Ignacio replied, "and it is also true, as I told you before, that the water goes back into the river. You can see where the flume goes down, branching off there to the right."

"There is a gate, also, to shut it off," Alvitre said.

"The river-bed drinks it, the sand is so dry," Comisionado Felix complained. He shook his head gravely, as if to say he found things worse than he had expected.

"Very little comes over the spillway, it is only a dribble that a donkey could almost drink," said Roja.

"The mill is not always going, only seven hours a day," Padre Mateo explained. "We close the gate at the head of the millrace at night; you get all the water that runs in the river then."

"A great deal of water is required to irrigate these fields and vineyards, these trees, these gardens," Alvitre said, spreading his hand to include all." And there is much water shut behind this dam; it would take the little river weeks to fill it this time of the year. Consider our suffering, then, in the pueblo. If this goes on, our beasts must die."

"Water is a thing that cannot be denied men who were Christian-born, for the benefit of lazy Indians who make a pretense of Christianity for the sake of their bellies, my good padres," Comisionado Felix said. "I was a soldier in this country many years; I have helped drive these savages to the baptismal font even here at San Fernando, and I say there is no justice in taking from men who were created in God's image to give to such as they."

Felix spoke with great earnestness, evi-

dently sincere in his belief that the rights of the pueblo were being denied in favor of these beings whom he condemned and placed among the inferiors of creation.

"There are two fountains wasting water constantly," Alvitre charged with severity, speaking to Padre Mateo as if he would humble him for what had gone before. "Must Indians have fountains to put their dusty toes in? Enough water is wasted in those two fountains every day to make many little gardens green."

"How many people are there in the pueblo now?" Padre Ignacio inquired, turning suddenly to Felix.

"More than five hundred, Padre. They arrive on every ship."

"There is water enough in the river where the road crosses it to enter the pass to supply three times that many people, and all their gardens, all their flocks and animals of every kind," Padre Ignacio maintained. "I crossed there only two days ago; there is water over the fetlocks of a horse."

"Four of five inches of it there, yes, in a little stream two yards wide," said Roja. "But it is miles away from the pueblo yet; the sand drinks it as it goes and no more comes in along the way."

"The rains are six weeks off," Alvitre said. "It is not only the present, but the future." the *comisionado* argued.

"Would you have us tear out the dam, then?" Padre Mateo demanded, in tones of defiance.

"It is God's water," Roja contended, "no more for priests to divert away to the use of Indians than for citizens and their children."

"Peace!" Padre Ignacio commanded sternly, the wide sleeve of his gown running down his brown sinewy arm as he lifted his hand. "There is water enough. Return to the pueblo and let it be understood there will be no change made in the economy of this mission. If necessary, the pueblo can be established in another place, where there is water for all future needs. This work shall not be abandoned, our fields and vineyards left to shrivel in the sun, for the convenience or comfort of any who came to this land after us and established themselves in our shadow. Go back to the pueblo and tell them this."

"You talk of moving the pueblo as one speaks of lifting a box," Comisionado Felix said resentfully. "Well, Padre Ignacio, I have known you a long time, and I knew Padre Lasuen, who built this mission, before you, and I tell you that I never heard more unreasonable, more unwise words come out of the mouth of a priest. The day of your oppression in this place is nearly over, but the pueblo will be there when the walls of this mission are dust. Come, my friends; let us go."

The three at the mill door watched the visitors from the pueblo away, Padre Ignacio so indignant that he had no thought of attending them back to their horses at the mission door.

"So the admirable Comisionado Felix lays bare in a word the core of their complaint against us," Padre Mateo said. "Did you understand that mode of speech, Juan?"

"Only a word here and there."

"The base animal, calling us oppressors in a land that is incontestably our own!" Padre Ignacio spoke with passionate indignation, his thin brown face reddening in the first gust of anger Juan ever had seen rise in him.

"That is the complaint of the trespasser everywhere," Padre Mateo said, "of the covetous who come to profit out of the labors of industrious men. We dominate this country, but no man can charge with justice that we oppress. We have made it; we shall hold it."

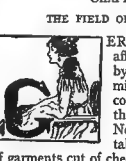
"If God wills, if God wills," Padre Ignacio said gently, his flush of anger gone.

"This is the core of their indictment, this charge of oppression," Padre Mateo went on. "They are making their argument for the confiscation of our property on that plea. Consider our poor Indians in the hands of such villains as that gallant three!"

"It may come, but we shall not live to see it, Brother Mateo," Padre Ignacio said. "The government is not so weak as to listen to such wretches."

Chapter X

THE FIELD OF TWO PALMS



ERTRUDIS SINOVA, affectionately called Tula by her equals at the mission, sat where she could see the fountain through the open door. Near by stood a long table on which patterns of garments cut of cheerful blue and red cotton cloth were orderly spread. Along the sides of the table, ranged on benches, the sewing class was at work, advanced students guiding the hands of beginners, a happy chatter filling the immense room, spacious enough to have seated a class of four times the number.

This bright autumn morning, when the scarred hills seemed to have drawn so near that one could have called greeting to the

shepherds in the little green canyons with their flocks, the old barracks-room was as cheerful as sunlight and youth could make it, and there is no illumination in all the devices of men that can reach so far into the heart as these. Juan Molinero felt the gushing of a great happiness when he stood looking in at the open door.

Tula Sinova was all in white, like an evening primrose. There was a little spray of fragrant jasmine blossoms in her rippling hair above her ear. Her head was bent slightly over the work upon which her hands lay idle; one sandaled foot was thrust out a little, as if it started toward the open door to follow her dreams away. She was pensive, and seemed oppressed; there was a shadow in her cheek as of a face that sorrow had held between its hands.

Juan had stopped a little way beyond the door, his feet soft on the parking of green lawn that bordered the tile-paved path. He knew that Dona Magdalena was watching him, and laughing at his timid heart. Gertrudis seemed to feel his shadow in the path, as one feels a cloud before closed eyes. He removed his low-crowned hat as she turned her face, greeting him with a smile.

It might have been a Castilian gentleman from the very shadow of the Alhambra whom she beheld standing between her and the fountain, the sun glinting in his bright hair, striking in little metallic gleams as she had seen it glint and glisten in the sands of Santa Monica, wet in the racing seas. The tailor of San Fernando had done credit to his craft and justice to the frame of his customer. Padre Mateo had seen to that. Denied the pleasure of fine raiment himself, the honest padre had no small enjoyment in the example of elegance and grace that this adopted son of the mission presented.

Tula laid aside the linen that she had held in her lap and came to the door, a thimble on her finger, scissors hanging like a crucifix on a black braid about her neck.

"You would look in at my class, Don Juan?" said she.

How could Magdalena have thought of so gross a comparison for the delicate tint that ran, like a shadow over a fair land, from throat to cheeks as she spoke? A blush red as measles, the dona had said. Juan sniffed. It was the impalpable pigment of sunset above the hills; the elusive beauty of the sweetest bloom.

"I will include the class," said he, but he could not have sworn, on the word of a true man, that Tula was keeping a class that day. There was Tula in the door. A man's vision fused upon her radiance; it faltered like a dying sunbeam at the window of her eyes.

"Will you enter, Don Juan, and see the class at work?"

"I am only passing, Senorita Gertrudis, there is a new liberty for my feet to-day. You have heard that the soldiers are gone?"

"I saw them ride away at sunrise, thank God!"

"So I can cross the road now without fear of the dogs," he laughed, shifting his feet like a bashful swain, his eyes now on the path, now on her face, now on the hills, varying as the seed of an alamo blown on its feathery wings.

"Be watchful, Don Juan! How can you go with a laugh when there is so much peril? They may be waiting for you to appear, as before."

"No, there is no pretense this time; they are gone."

"Dona Magdalena says it is a plot to humble the padres. They believe the Indians will rise."

"Never against the padres."

"Against the soldiers themselves, or perhaps against the authority of Don Geronimo?"

"Who knows?" Juan returned her the Spaniard's answer, making an exposition of entire neutrality of mind with his outspread hands, facile as he was in that mode of expression from long use of the sign language among savage neighbors and foes in the forests of Kentucky.

"But why will you cross the road this morning, Don Juan? Captain del Valle is a man who will not accept defeat; he may be waiting around the wall."

"The mission is only a few miles square, Miss Tula; just a little place for a man who has roamed a continent."

"Your heart is eager to be away, Don Juan. Home is dearer than friends in a distant place."

Juan turned his head to see if Dona Magdalena had gone into her kitchen. She was standing where he had left her, watchful duenna that she was, for all her bantering.

"I will pass on," he said, turning his hat in his hands.

"Until the next meeting, Don Juan," she returned, gravely courteous as if that time stood far away.

"I will pass on, Senorita Tula," Juan repeated. But not convincingly; more in a way that seemed to plead for a detaining word.

"Until the next sight, Don Juan," she murmured, filling her breast with a quick breath that escaped again at once, a sigh.

Tula was fingering the scissors on the tape;

she looked up, her eyes hesitant, timid, yet governed by a curiosity that was not to be denied.

Juan was trapped; he felt hot blood in his face as he turned his glance away, withdrawing it like a hand caught pilfering. Padre Ignacio was returning from the mill; there was a sound of the cargo of onions being unloaded from the cart.

"Now, I am going," said Juan. He put his hat on his head; he moved his foot in the path.

"Go with God, Don Juan," said she, low, like a benediction. And after that word he could not stay.

THERE were wonders to be seen in the field of the two palms, where the gray adobe wall ran in line as true as transit could draw it. First of all, there was the wonder of the wall itself, not less than eight feet thick at the bottom, where it stood on a foundation of round stones brought from the river-bed, tapering to three feet at the top. It was nine or ten feet high, and enclosed at least two hundred acres. Juan stood at the gate admitting to this fruitful enclosure, struck with astonishment by the evidence of so much labor so unwisely spent.

Hundreds of hands had toiled through many months to raise that wall, brick upon brick of sun-dried adobe bound with a mortar of mud; savage hearts must have rebelled at the enforced task, which must have appeared unreasonable even in their slow and groping minds; savage hearts must have broken, savage pride fallen crushed to rise no more, driven by lash and bayonet to this labor of lifting a rampart strong enough to stop an army, against no greater enemy than domestic cattle and murmuring flocks of sheep.

Borromeo had repeated to him Don Geronimo's saying that there was nothing in the world so plentiful and so cheap as human labor, which Juan's devices were all designed to conserve. It required the illustration of this thick broad wall to give him the true valuation of the mayor-domo's argument, an unquestionable interpretation of his social and economic ethics. Untempered cruelty was the foundation of that belief, insatiable greed its distorted genius. The padres were blind to its monstrous barbarity in their zeal of building to the glory of Christ.

The greater part of the field within the strong adobe wall had been sown to grain the stubble of which was still standing almost knee-high to a man, proof of the prodigious leavening that land contained. Juan calculated that the ripe grain must have been as high as the heads of the reapers who went to gather it with their primitive sickles and bind it into little sheaves no thicker than a man's thigh.

These sheaves were being carted to a circular enclosure over against that part of the wall nearest the mission buildings, whence there rose a confusion of dust and voices. Cattle were being driven around and around inside this fenced circle; Juan knew it was the threshing floor, where the grain was being trampled from the husk under the feet of oxen. He was filled with a compelling curiosity to witness this operation.

This threshing pen was about fifty feet in diameter. In the center of it sheaves of untrampled grain were thrown, from which point they were distributed under the oxen's feet as required. Two teams of oxen, yoked four abreast, were being driven around the circle, prodded out of their ordinarily leisurely gait by young men who trotted beside them with goads. The cattle were dripping sweat, their tongues were lolling, apparently at the utter bound of endurance. Dust rose thick from the dry straw, and from the uncovered ground where the grain was beaten out under the tortured creatures' feet.

The Indians, not far enough advanced yet to feel compassion for a suffering beast, seemed altogether unconscious of their cruelty. Here, as elsewhere when they worked without the direct superintendence of Don Geronimo, there was singing and laughter and merry light words among the young men who had been born and bred under the mission régime. Only the older men, the true neophytes, or converts from the state of heathenism, were silent as they moved slowly, apathetically, perhaps unwillingly, about this labor which they never came to love.

Juan watched the threshing with a feeling over him that he had been shifted from the present into the far past. It might have been that he stood at the edge of the field where Boaz bent with his sickle, and Ruth came with timid feet far behind him, gleaning the scattered ears of grain. For surely this was not the method of modern men.

Here, on one hand, lay the grain already threshed, whether yesterday or to-day he did not know. It was heaped on the bare ground, filled with chaff and dirt which certain old men labored with indifferent success to remove by tossing the grain in the wind for the lighter particles to blow away. Close beside this heap of grain the trampled, broken straw was thrown, carelessness, uncleanliness,

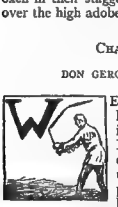
disorder, over the whole that made the thought of bread repellent.

Juan lifted a handful of straw, finding it filled with fragments of unthreshed heads; he stirred it with his foot, to see whole grains, broken grains, fall in a shower. At least a fourth of the grain was wasted in this ancient, ignorant method of threshing. In its twenty centuries of history Spain had not thought of a better way.

For months this threshing had been in progress at the mission, Juan knew; it must continue two or three weeks longer, calculating from the amount of grain still in the shock in that field, which was the largest and the last. Juan turned back to the mission, leaving all that he had not seen of the field of the two palms to another day. The sharp cries of the young men who drove the weary oxen in their staggering round followed him over the high adobe wall.

CHAPTER XI

DON GERONIMO'S WRATH



ELL, Juan Molinero, you have not shown me a new invention," said Padre Ignacio. "I have heard of such an instrument, used for the purpose you propose to put this to, I believe, but principally as an ancient weapon of war. Flail, is it, in the English tongue? In Castilian it is *flagelo*, plainly meaning an instrument for the infliction of punishment. I am afraid, my gentle Juan, that your contrivance will be looked upon in that light by the poor Indians, who would much rather have the cattle do this work of threshing than bend their backs and do it themselves."

Juan had gone straightway from the threshing-floor, if the fenced circle trampled by the oxen could be so called, to the carpenter shop, where he had found wood of toughness and grain suitable for the swingle and shaft of a flail. The two parts of the simple implement he connected with a rawhide thong. Now he was on his way, the flail in his hand, Padre Ignacio at his side, to give a demonstration of the flail in the field where the threshers were at work, there being no grain in the sheaf elsewhere in the mission fields.

Cristobal accompanied them, carrying a thick canvas to spread for a threshing-floor. Juan explained that results would not be as satisfactory under these conditions as on a firm barn floor of planks, but he hoped to convince Padre Ignacio of the superior economy in this mode.

"No, it is not a new thing, Padre Ignacio," Juan admitted. "The German and English people have used the flail for threshing ever since they grew grain. But they are people who do not shun hard work when it will bring them better bread."

"Ah, we are an indolent people, we Castilians, except in the conquest of worlds," Padre Ignacio returned. Gentle and just as he was, he could not suppress the pride and irony that leveled all men's achievements to dust in comparison with the race from which he sprung.

Work in the threshing-pen was suspended while Juan illustrated the use of the implement he had made. In that day the use of the flail was a part of every American farmer's craft; Juan had been notable with it as a stripling, when he once took the championship away from a whiskered giant famous over three counties for his fourteen hundredweight of grain a day. The Indians pressed in silent interest to watch him, while the chaff flew in a cloud beneath his lusty strokes.

In a little while Juan had threshed half a hundred-weight of grain. He scooped a double handful and lifted it to Padre Ignacio's inspection, letting it rain down between his fingers, and winnow in the wind, Padre Ignacio said nothing. He bent and ran his fingers through the little heap of clean whole grain, sifting it through his fingers as if not ready to accept the evidence until he had satisfied himself there was no trick about it.

Juan scooped his hands full of the grain from the threshing-floor where the oxen had trampled, and offered it in comparison.

"It is cleaner, there are not so many broken kernels," Padre Ignacio admitted. "But see how you sweat, Juan. It is a labor to thresh grain with your machine."

Juan could see in the faces of the Indians the same thought, the same objection. This was not like the mill; there was nothing marvelous in beating out grain with a jointed stick. He had not come to them with a labor-saving implement but a man-consuming device, as the oldest and the dullest Indian alike could see.

Don Geronimo had approached unseen until that moment by any of the interested spectators. With his arrival there was a general scurrying back to their duty among the Indians, who cringed as they ran in expectation of the bite of Don Geronimo's whip. The mayor-domo reined up at the edge of the spread canvas, his face dark with displeasure.

"What is this diversion? Why are these

men standing idle?" he demanded of Padre Ignacio.

"The day is long enough, Don Geronimo; we can spare them a few minutes from their tasks," Padre Ignacio replied, his manner gently corrective, gently resentful of the harsh challenge of authority in that place.

"Yes, if you priests were left to conduct the business of this mission everybody soon would starve," Don Geronimo declared, scornfully as a man ever spoke.

"Juan has been giving us an exemplification of a tool, an ancient weapon applied by the men of many nations to the arts of peace. You see, Don Geronimo, the grain he has beaten out with a few deft strokes—he was not half an hour about it, I am certain. The advantages of this mode are apparent to me; I see more and more in favor of it as I reflect and consider."

"We can have no more of this change and innovation at San Fernando," Don Geronimo said. "This meddling with the old, time-established order is demoralizing; it advances nothing but discontent and laziness."

"It cannot be said of the flail, then, Don Geronimo, that it would encourage a lazy disposition in any man," Padre Ignacio returned, in smiling good humor. "Look at Juan; see how the sweat pours out of him from threshing this little heap of wheat. A man would earn his salt at a day's work with the flail, you may be certain."

CANNOT permit this interference in my fields, this distraction among my workmen," Don Geronimo said sharply.

"Don Geronimo!" Padre Ignacio chided.

Juan was standing by, his jacket thrown aside, his shirt wet on his muscular back, the flail in his hand. He was far more resentful of Don Geronimo's insolent declaration of authority than Padre Ignacio, whom the mayor-domo made so bold as to push aside as a man of no consequence in the affairs and administration of the mission San Fernando.

"Let this spy of a despicable, upstart nation keep to the mill in future. I tell you, Padre Ignacio, I will have no more of his interference and silly contrivances."

"That will be enough, Don Geronimo," Padre Ignacio said sternly, the gentleness of his face yielding to an expression of dignified command. "Where this son of San Fernando chooses to walk within our limits, there he shall walk without the interference of any man."

"A weak prejudice for him, growing in your heart for his supposed services to you, blinds your eyes to his true guise," Don Geronimo charged. He leaned toward Padre Ignacio as he spoke, his face flushed with the rising of his anger, little thinking that Juan had the intelligence to understand nearly all that he said.

"He has done us great service, Don Geronimo; simple gratitude is but poor payment for what he has given us."

"Padre Ignacio, I tell you the man is a spy, sent here by his government to learn how the soil is cultivated, how we make raisins, dry our figs, how the seasons come and go, and all the secrets necessary to the ten thousand of his kind that stand ready to flock here and overrun us like locusts."

"That is a lie in the mouth of a liar!" Juan stepped forward to hurl the charge into Don Geronimo's face like a stone.

Don Geronimo lifted himself in his stirrups, face distorted by the sweep of his sudden passion. Padre Ignacio anticipated his intention, and leaped with incredible swiftness under the fiercely flung lash. The scornful, hate-driven blow of the mayor-domo's whip fell sharply across the priest's shoulders, only the lash of it stinging Juan's arm.

So the gentle old man stood between them, his arms spread to keep them apart. Cristobal, hurt deeper than Padre Ignacio by the indignity of the blow, cried out sharply and sprang forward, as if to tear Don Geronimo from his horse. Juan Molinero swung his flail, unheeding of the priest's clutching, frantic hand upon his arm, and struck Don Geronimo from the saddle with a sweeping, terrible blow.

Cristobal's shout of triumph rang over the dusty field, where the workmen flung down their tools as if liberty had come to them with that swift blow, and came running to witness the overthrow of the tyrant who had driven them with pitiless hand.

Don Geronimo's horse sprang away as its master fell, the stirrups flinging high as it galloped to the gate. Don Geronimo lay on his back, his black whip on its thong about his wrist, its long lash trailing across his breast. Blood ran into his beard from a great gash that opened from cheekbone to forehead across his temple. Dust was gray on his face, and there was in it the look of death.

Padre Ignacio dropped on his knees beside the mayor-domo, one hand on his heart, one on his lips, searching out the spark of life. Juan came and stood over the prostrate man, neither contrition nor anger in his face.

"He is not dead, by a long shot, Padre Ignacio," he said.

"Thank God!" Padre Ignacio said, breathing in relief. "Bring a cart, Cristobal—that one just emptied of sheaves." He turned to Juan, his face sadder than Juan ever had seen it, yet something inexorably hard and accusing in his eyes. "Juan Molinero, you have done a terrible deed!" he said.

"It was for the blow you took, Padre Ignacio."

"I would have borne it, Juan, in forgiveness."

"He can't strike a white man with his whip! He's no lord of creation."

"You have struck down authority before the eyes of those who must bend and subjugate themselves to it. No man can see the evil fruit of this woful stroke, let Don Geronimo live or die. I took the blow that was intended for you, Juan, from Don Geronimo's hand, but I cannot assume the consequences that your vengeful anger must bring upon your head."

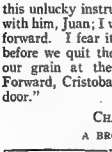
"My back is broad, Padre Ignacio; I can carry it."

The cattle were standing again in the threshing-pen, the pitchforks, sieves and measures were dropped, while the Indians crowded to look at Don Geronimo, blood mingling with the dust on his beard. There was excitement in the faces of even the most stolid; eagerness gleamed in all their eyes. They pressed round the spot where Don Geronimo lay, their bare feet noiseless in the dust of the trodden field, short, ejaculatory words passing under their breath from man to man. Cristobal came with the cart; they parted to let him pass.

"Gently with him!" Padre Ignacio cautioned, for there was neither gentleness nor pity in the hands that clutched Don Geronimo to lift him into the cart. "Here, put this unlucky instrument of yours in the cart with him, Juan; I will take charge of it henceforward. I fear it will be many a long day before we quit the old method of threshing our grain at the Mission San Fernando. Forward, Cristobal; hasten with him to his door."

CHAPTER XII

A BROKEN FIESTA



AFTER vespers the Indians were merry that evening over their green corn and beef. Don Geronimo's abasement was the motive of their delight. Each family group gathered around the big kettle which held their supper, where it hung over the fire in the back yard of the cabin—for the padres began early to instill the patio usage, the Spanish love of seclusion, in their wards—and talked of the noble deed Juan Molinero had done. They raised him in their praise as they humiliated Don Geronimo. And now Don Geronimo was dead, they said. Don Juan was to be mayor-domo. They should have justice; they should feel the cut of the cruel black whip no more.

There was little serious thought, then or at any time, of rising against the beneficent authority of the padres. It was against the machinery the padres employed that the resentment of the neophytes rose. There never were more than two priests at one time stationed at San Fernando and they were most earnestly employed with spiritual supervision. But soldiers always had been at the various missions, or stationed within easy call, to enforce the discipline of these who directed the labors in the fields. The Indians were not willing toilers in the upbuilding of these vast mud palaces, these high-walled, stolid, frowning, gloomy churches, yet never since the remote days of the beginning at San Diego de Acala, when they killed two of the pioneer padres, had they lifted their hands against the priests.

There was beginning to be much talk of liberty among the young men, it is true, words put into their mouths by crafty rascals who would have changed the Indians' pastoral security under mission rule to the debauched state of wage slavery. To-night this talk of liberty was bolder and more outspoken than ever before. The young men gathered in the trampled little streets, talking of working as freemen among the ranchers, gaining money and horses, flocks, herds, homes of their own, instead of bending their labors to the padres' comfort and enrichment with no promise of future change.

Let the old ones and the timid ones remain at the missions, they said. Now that Don Geronimo was down, it was time for the young ones to go. Excitement grew on them as they gathered before their doors in the white moonlight and talked. There seemed to be a new freedom in every movement, in every breath. The feeling that the task-master watched and listened, the restraint of his cold presence over every fiesta, every marriage, every occasion when men should laugh and fling the feet free of the thought of toil; all this restraint was dissolved, broken like bonds of glass By Don Juan's angry blow.

Laughter rose lightly on the night wind. The young men brought their fiddles and guitars; they danced with the girls in the little square, the old ones sitting by with nods and smiles and low words, in the comfortable

relaxation that comes after long watching, and hardship, and pain.

The sound of the music and happy voices mounted in through the open window and broke upon Padre Ignacio's meditations. At first he heard with nothing more than a subconscious realization, as one is aware of the insect chorus of a summer night. Then it welled until it became insistent, clamorous on the ear for attention. Padre Ignacio paused in his tramping to lean at the window and listen.

"This is strange!" he muttered, hearing laughter rise unrestrained as the music ceased. "They are dancing, when it is neither a fiesta nor the eve of a fiesta, without permission asked or given."

Padre Ignacio was deeply troubled and disturbed by this loud evidence of independent thought and action by his neophytes. It was the first time in his mission experience of thirty years and more that such a demonstration had occurred, and he decided to go at once and remonstrate with his foolish children, censure them sternly and send them to bed.

Juan was standing in the court looking at the moon, disconsolate, Padre Ignacio thought, as a lonesome dog. The kitchen door was closed, the ready word of Dona Magdalena lacking to cheer the night. Save for Juan, the court was empty. The jet of the fountain sparkled in the strong moonlight; the scent of rose and lemon bloom was sweet.

"Come with me, Juan, and see the result of this day's work with your four-times-unlucky flail," Padre Ignacio said.

Juan was not troubled over that day's work with his flail to any uneasy extent. His one regret was that it might alienate the friendship of Dona Magdalena. For Don Geronimo he had no care, whether he lived or died.

"You see how they mock discipline, Juan." Padre Ignacio stretched out his hand with the slow, revealing, accusing gesture of a man who unveils to another the result of his wilfulness. "They have seen authority struck down; they are following the example set before their eyes."

"They seem to be having a good time," Juan said, still not struck by any contrite pang.

"It is not authorized, they did not ask permission to play fiesta this night," Padre Ignacio said, his voice shocked, injured, the disappointment bitter for him to bear.

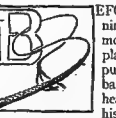
"Must they ask permission to laugh and sing?" Juan inquired, unable to see where anybody had room for injury in the innocent scene before their eyes.

"This is permitted only on days of fiesta, when it is proclaimed. I have been gentle with them always, even sparing the children when it seemed even the credo was beyond their grasp. I have given them grace by patience where others have used the stick. But look at them now."

"There is Cristobal with his guitar," Juan pointed out.

"Ah, Cristobal is a good lad, a loving boy. But there are not many like Cristobal. They will disperse at my command, Juan; I have no fear of that. But with what reservations for to-morrow? That is like lead on my breast. They have seen authority——"

"They're going to see it again, then. Look there!"



BEFORE them Don Geronimo stepped into the moonlight of the little plaza, his broad hat pulled low over the white bandage that circled his head and came down to his eyes. Pistols were in his belt; his black whip was on his wrist.

"Don Geronimo! He heard the revelry; he rose from his bed of pain."

Juan had a thought of warning Cristobal, whose back he felt the black whip would single out for its vicious assault. Padre Ignacio restrained him as he stepped out into the moonlight to shout Cristobal's name.

There was no need to warn Cristobal, whose quick eyes were the first to see the mayor-domo, and to realize with a falling heart that the celebration of his passing was premature. A surprised cry, low like a moan of pain, followed Cristobal's word of warning as the people rose and cleared out of the plaza like leaves before a wind.

Don Geronimo's whip burned like a branding-iron wherever it fell, and it was as quick as a serpent in his supple hand. It lashed all alike in its indiscriminate fury. Don Geronimo's voice rose strong over the screams of women and children as they fled before his arm.

"Who has declared a fiesta?" he demanded. "Who has told you to sing and dance? Now sing with pain, dance with agony, you dogs!"

Don Geronimo rushed from side to side of the plaza, his leaping whip never falling short. Juan was furious at the sight of this atrocious punishment where a word would have served as well. But Padre Ignacio had firm grip of his wrist; he remained in the shadow, writhing in pain at the sound of the screams and the

sobs of those who felt the fiery touch of Don Geronimo's lash.

"Let us return; I shall not be needed here," Padre Ignacio said.

Juan attended him; the confusion of the village, the running feet, the lamentations of the flogged, sadly disturbing the placid night. He could not feel that Padre Ignacio was not needed there, where authority had come again to dissipate the rejoicing of innocence, and tyranny to stamp under relentless feet the springing fires of manhood and liberty.

So, Don Geronimo was not down; sad revelation to those who had stolen a little breath of liberty that night.

"I did not expect such a quick recovery," Padre Ignacio said, comforted and vastly relieved, "although life came back to him within half an hour. Come with me to my chamber, Juan. There is something on my heart that I must say to you this night."

Chapter XIII

BANISHMENT

PADRE IGNACIO brought the chair from beside his bed and placed it for Juan at the table-end over against the north window. There they seated themselves, the thick tallow candle standing between them throwing off a smell of cracklings, such as the Indians feasted on after the fat had been pressed out of them in the vats.

"It is plain then, Juan, that this unfortunate engagement between you and Don Geronimo brings affairs to a crisis," Padre Ignacio said.

"Let him go about his own business and I'll attend to mine," Juan proposed, not disturbed by the padre's uneasiness for the future.

"Don Geronimo is not a man to accept a blow without retaliation. He is a hot, a vengeful man."

"I wouldn't expect him to let it pass."

"What can end this feud, then, but the death of one or both of you? Unless, certainly, you make peace with Don Geronimo as a Christian should."

"If he'll come and offer it, Padre Ignacio, I'll not turn my back."

"Don Geronimo is not the aggressor, my son. You were the first at fault, Juan, the morning you stood between Don Geronimo and Cristobal at the winepress. It was a defiance of his authority before the eyes of the meanest; it threw Don Geronimo in contempt."

"He was about to do a contemptible thing."

"After the insubordination you have witnessed to-night, you should know better than to condemn Don Geronimo for his inflexible hand, my son. You have seen how license springs from the striking down of authority, how the spirit of anarchy sweeps like a fire among the unrestrained."

"I have seen a coward lashing harmless women and children with a whip! That is all I have seen to-night that was wrong, Padre Ignacio."

"We are spending words for nothing, Juan. There are two courses open to you for insuring the placidity of San Fernando: the first is to go humbly and contritely to Don Geronimo this night, and crave his pardon for the passionate weakness that drove you to strike him with your unlucky flail."

Juan shook his head, his lips set firmly, his countenance severe.

"The other course is that you leave San Fernando within three days. I pronounce this sentence with a heavy heart. Grateful as I am, dearly as I have come to love you for your candor, your honor, your truth, I must set your face to the perils of the long journey back to your own country, unless your wisdom prompts you to accept the simpler, the truly Christian way."

Padre Ignacio looked at Juan appealingly, his brown hand put out as if to invite to the simplicity of this course. Juan did not see the inviting hand, nor the pathetic, tender appeal of Padre Ignacio's eyes. He was staring at the window, his eyes fixed as if he saw the long road stretching through many dangers that led to his home and kind. He shook his head again, unmoved.

"I can't go and bend my neck to Don Geronimo," he said.

Padre Ignacio regarded him in silence, the eager appeal dying out of his face. He saw that Juan would accept any penance rather than that single one that would bend down his pride. He was a man who confessed no superior.

"You can understand the justness of my decision, Juan?" he seemed to beseech.

"Don Geronimo struck the first blow; let him come to me," Juan replied.

"It cannot be," Padre Ignacio sighed, despairing of making him understand.

"Then there's nothing for me but to leave."

Padre Ignacio did not speak. He sat with head bent, overwhelmed by a cataract of thought. One sandaled foot was set beyond the shadow of the table, a sturdy, dusty foot that seemed as if it had come to rest but then

from tramping the long white trails of that summer land.

"Will you permit me to take the horse that fell into my hands from Alvitre?" Juan inquired.

"But I will be happier to know that you are alive, filling the useful destiny that God has planned for you, than dead here by Don Geronimo's hand," Padre Ignacio said, his head still bent, his voice low. "The horse?" looking up suddenly, as if the words had only penetrated his ear that moment. "Take him, Juan. I wish I could give you riches to load his back. But you will prosper without that."

Padre Ignacio's fingers clasped his young friend's hand, pressing it tenderly. His face was bright with a smile, but tears stood in his eyes.

"So, make ready, Juan. The third day from this must not see you in San Fernando."

"I am ready. When everything is quiet to-night I'll leave you, Padre Ignacio. You can direct me to the pass that leads to the mission road across the sands?"

"It is by way of San Gabriel. No; not to-night, Juan—there is no pressure to force you away to-night. To-morrow I will give you a map, and letters to those at San Gabriel who will assist you on your way. Now I go to Don Geronimo, to tell him of your banishment. He shall have no cause to say you have gone unpunished and seek adjustment with his own hand. To-morrow, Juan, to-morrow."

"I think it will be better to go soon, since *I* must go."

It was a sad thing for Juan, this banishment from San Fernando, where he had come an uncouth stranger but a little while ago. Its quaintness had become as familiar as his own face, its medieval atmosphere, its baronial government, had come to be accepted as truly fitting to the Old World somnolence of that sunny land. The charm of it had won him from his recollections; the peace of it had quelled his yearnings for home, until the past had become very dim and far away, its renewal not any more desired.

He had hoped that the stern law of that land otherwise so genial and inviting would be set aside in his case, in answer to Padre Ignacio's generous appeal. With such immunity he could have taken land on the river, somewhere in the broad and fecund valley between San Fernando and the Pueblo de Los Angeles, and established a prosperous ranch, free alike from the harassments of winter and the hazards of drought.

But, as Padre Ignacio had said, such exception might not be granted, the paper might never come. In such event, the mission soon would grow a small place for one whose feet never before had acknowledged bounds. So he had thought. But to-night, with the sentence of banishment upon him, he would have been glad to accept the restrictions which had bound him during his stay, for the balance of his days. For there was that to be left behind at San Fernando which all the world beyond could not supply.

That was not Borromeu's footstep on the tiled garden path, nor Padre Mateo's step. It might be Dona Magdalena, coming to her kitchen to see that all was well. But she had passed the kitchen door; she was coming toward the fountain, perhaps cooling her brow after Don Geronimo's foray into the plaza. It would be a trying experience to meet Dona Magdalena, and hear her reproaches, yet there was no way to escape, For Dona Magdalena's sake he was sorry for the blow he had given Don Geronomo with the flail. He bowed his head in his hand, waiting for her to speak.

"WILL you assist me, Don Juan? Padre Ignacio sent me for roses to refresh the breakfast table."

Tula, white as a white rose she had come to gather, stood beside the fountain, a basket in her hand.

"How many do you require?" said Juan, taking the little bright shears out of her hand, the same, indeed, that she had worn that morning hung about her neck like a crucifix.

"Wait, Don Juan—the braid!"

She took it from round her neck and tossed it playfully over his head.

"I have caught you now, Don Juan!" she laughed. "You are my apprentice to the shears."

"Bind me to the trade," he suggested, gravely. "Make it a long apprenticeship."

"They should be sheep shears then," said she. "But why would you have the apprenticeship long, Don Juan?"

"How many roses do you require?" he asked, his hand on the bramble that grew thicker than a strong man's arm.

"As many as the basket will hold, Don Juan."

Juan stood on the bench to reach the choice blossoms high on the trellis, Gertrudis holding the basket, the moonlight on her lifted face. The shadow in her cheek was deeper here than by the light of day; it seemed as if many hopes had departed out of her life, and few

had come to abide. Yet there was no sense of oppression in her manner, only a gentle patience as of one chastened and made sweet by pain. Her hair was fairer for the moonlight, fair as northern tresses, her heritage from some Gothic adventurer who set foot upon the Iberian plains so long ago.

"We have enough now, Don Juan; the basket will not hold another one."

"Here is one too many, then, and the best of them all. I was reserving it; you can put it in your hair."

"In the morning it will open," she said, holding it against her cheek. "When I see a rosebud burst, I think it is like a soul that goes to God."

Juan took the basket from her and placed it on the bench, while she wove the rose stem in her hair above her ear, where the jasmine blossom had held the place of honor as she sat that morning with her class, when Juan Molinero found it as difficult to pass by her door as if his own feet had been enmeshed in that soft entanglement.

"Now, I will run with the roses, Don Juan," she said, reaching out her hand.

He gave the basket to her, keeping hold of it still as if it stood, with its white burden, a covenant between them.

"Roses seem sweeter at night," she said, her head bent over them, her hand passive on the basket, no pressure in it to relieve him, nor any hurry in her feet to run away.

"Has Padre Ignacio told you of my banishment, Gertrudis?"

"Banishment?" She lifted her face quickly, in a panic of surprise.

"For the peace of San Fernando. You know what has happened?"

"May you always strike hard for those you love, Don Juan." She laid her free hand on his where it clasped the slender handle of the little basket, her seal of approval of the deed for which he stood under sentence of banishment. "But I did not know that you must go; I thought Padre Ignacio had arranged a truce. I heard him speak of a truce to Don Geronimo."

"Only covering the time I make my preparations to depart. To-morrow Padre Ignacio will give me letters to certain people on the way, and a map of the road I am to go."

"But the soldiers, Don Juan?"

"There will be no soldiers the way I am going, Tula; not even men of any kind for a long and weary way across the Southern desert. Very likely I'll leave in the night, besides. They'd find it hard to follow me."

"It will seem that so much will go with you away from San Fernando; Don Juan," she said pathetically, "so much of the life and energy of the place, so much that is needed here for the happiness of all."

"I wish I could think it so," he said, his voice low and grave.

"It will seem that hope will leave with you on your long, long journey to your homeland, Don Juan."

"I wish I might hope that it would be so, Gertrudis."

"You will go to those whom you love better, but to none that can wish you better than those you leave behind."

"I shall leave more behind me than I shall ever find again. If I had the freedom of this country outside the mission, Tula, Tula, I would not go, Tula. If the dispensation asked for me by Padre Ignacio were certain to be granted, I would hide in the mountains until it came."

"But it might be granted," she spoke eagerly, her handclasp tightening. "Then I could send you word, I could send Cristobal. Or I would go, Don Juan, I would go to the world's end to carry such good news to you."

He covered her hand with his broad palm, and so they stood, their four hands on the little basket, their fealty pledged in roses, their understanding blessed in bloom.

"And I would wait till the world's end for you to come," he told her, as earnestly as if he vowed. "But it is too uncertain, Tula; Padre Ignacio says it may take months, even years. I believe he has no hope that it ever will come at all."

"Then you will go away, Don Juan, into the desert, as one goes away into the night, never to be seen again?"

"Paper or no paper, I will come back, Gertrudis, if you will wait for me at San Fernando. Give me a year, and we will fill a basket of roses for our wedding day."

"A year, or ten years, Juan. I will be waiting here, if San Fernando stands."

"I am not a poor man in my own country, Gertrudis, and more than I own I can command. It will be a simple thing for me, if I ever reach the Mississippi, to go to Boston and sail with a ship for California. There is trade waiting anybody that will brave the barbarous laws of this country and sail a ship here freighted with the things that are needed to be exchanged for the hides there is no market for in Mexico. Give me a year, then, Tula, and I will return."

"As long as San Fernando stands."

"Your trust will carry me through. It may be for the best, after all, that I must go."

"I have been a long time after the roses, Juan," she said, gently freeing her hands

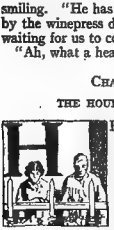
"Padre Ignacio will wonder why I am so slow."

"There is no mystery," Juan answered, smiling. "He has been sitting on the bench by the winepress door the past ten minutes, waiting for us to come."

"Ah, what a heart!" said she.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUR OF BETROTHAL



"HE WOULD have married her, but the wisdom of Padre Ignacio stood in the way," said Madgalena. "It is a perilous journey, Padre Ignacio said, that Juan is setting his feet upon. He may not return. It is better to be a maid than a widow. I heard him say the words."

"I'd rather be a rich widow than a poor maid, even pretty as God ever fashioned on his anvil," Borromeo declared.

"So they have gone to the church to plight their betrothal before the altar. That is next to a wedding; that will hold them true until they meet again, if ever that day shall come."

"I don't know," Borromeo demurred. "But how is Don Geronimo's split head mending? You must have care of fever that may strike to the brain."

"Don Geronimo rode last night to the pueblo. There was the rumor of a ship."

"So? He is not in his bed, then. He is a rash man to go riding through the heat with a cracked head."

"It is nothing to Don Geronimo!" Magdalena was displeased by Borromeo's familiar discussion of Don Geronimo's wound. She turned away coldly, as if to go.

"They are sealing their promises before the altar, heh?" Borromeo stooped for his hammer, after thrusting the cooling horseshoe back into the fire. He stood a little while with hand on the bellows, his head bent as if in reflection.

"I suppose it is done," she returned. "There is Padre Ignacio at the church door. They are remaining behind for prayers."

"I am not the man to cross the path of a friend," Borromeo said, blowing hard at the bellows, his face turned to the fire, "but if Juan does not come back when his year is past, then I'll marry Tula myself. A man is not an old man at thirty——"

"Soldiers!" said Dona Magdalena, startled, alarmed. "What is this?"

"Soldiers?" Borromeo repeated, going to the door, wiping his hands on his leather apron as he went. "I thought we were done with those scoundrels. Olivera rides ahead, and here is little Captain del Valle, coming galloping as if he had stopped to pick up a purse. Juan! They have come for Juan!"

"Impossible! Why this day than any——"

"He has been betrayed! News of his banishment has been carried to the pueblo by some vengeful traitor. Del Valle would not risk taking him on the road, but comes here to do it in safety."

"If you mean Don Geronimo——"

"Don Geronimo I mean!"

"Then you lie!"

Sharply as Magdalena flung the insulting charge, it was no more than a pellet against Borromeo's indignant wrath. He pushed her out of his door without a word and went running after the troopers, who were riding in a clatter of shod hooves along the paved arcade to the church door where Padre Ignacio stood. Magdalena saw that the blacksmith carried a long iron bar in his prodigious hand.

Padre Ignacio stood at the vestry door, just as he had emerged from the church but a few moments before, astonished by this rude invasion, this barbarous charge against the very walls of the sacred building in whose protecting shadow he waited. At the corner of the church the headlong advance halted suddenly at Captain del Valle's command. There the little force divided, four troopers going with Sergeant Olivera to the front door, four continuing with Captain del Valle to confront Padre Ignacio where he stood, his indignation, his great bewilderment, upon him.

"What is the meaning of this wild riding into these sacred precincts, Captain del Valle?" Padre Ignacio demanded, his voice trembling in resentment of the outrage.

"I have come to demand the body of Juan Molinero, so-called, who has entered California in defiance of the king's edict, and who stands charged with murderous assault on the person of Don Geronimo Lozano, mayor-domo of San Fernando."

"You shall not touch him, for all your grandiloquent charges. Juan Molinero is under discipline of the church for such misdemeanor as he is guilty of. His punishment is extreme. Turn again, Captain del Valle, and be careful that you ride in the cart track, not across the pavement of our arcade."

"This temporizing cannot stand in the way of justice, Padre Ignacio. Juan Molinero must be surrendered into my hands."

"Call your ruffians from the door of this sacred house, or you shall suffer for this sacrilege!"

"I am not to be denied. Threats, my good Padre, cannot bar me here."

"Juan Molinero is in sanctuary; he is at his prayers within."

"Then we shall drag him out, with irons on his arms. Inside, Olivera!"

Borromeo rushed by Padre Ignacio and into the church.

"To the altar, Juan! To the altar! The soldiers are upon you!" the blacksmith shouted, his great voice roaring in the empty church, coming back instantly in shattered echoes from the choir loft and stately gables.

Padre Ignacio hastened after Borromeo; two troopers dismounted at the captain's command and entered through the vestry door.

There was neither bench nor pew, nor cushion to kneel upon at prayer, in the spacious interior of San Fernando church. The white plastered walls, the soft red tiles of the floor, clean as devoted care could make them, lent an atmosphere of purity and sanctity to the place. Its very emptiness seemed to accentuate its consecration to holy purposes, to lofty meditation, to heaven-aspiring prayer.

The boots of Sergeant Olivera and his men —two at his back, two keeping the door— were loud on the tiles before Borromeo's warning was hurled among the beams. Juan and Gertrudis were standing before the altar, their hands clasped. She shrank against him in terror of the soldiers, their defiance of that sanctuary, the sudden violence in their peaceful hour.

"Stand!" Sergeant Olivera commanded, advancing with drawn saber.

"The soldiers!" said Gertrudis weakly, clinging in stifling fright to Juan's supporting hand. "Leave me, Juan—fly!"

EVEN with an eagle's wings he could not have escaped them, if it had been in his heart to go and leave her there, stricken and white at the altar steps. Soldiers were at the inner vestry door close behind Padre Ignacio, who lifted his hands to stay the sacrilegious advance of those who had entered from the front.

"Put up your weapon, Sergeant Olivera! Outside with your men!" the priest commanded.

Sergeant Olivera lifted his saber in salute, but did not pause a moment in his advance. He was within a few yards of the spot where Juan and Gertrudis stood. Padre Ignacio came down hastily and stood before the altar, spreading out his arms.

"Let no man touch him on pain of being denied the holy sacrament!" he cried, shocked to the heart by the thing that was being done.

Sergeant Olivera stopped, his head bent for a moment as if he faltered before the interdiction and its dread penalty. Then he lifted his eyes, his face white as if the blood of his heart had been drained away.

"A soldier must obey his commander first, Padre, and afterward make his peace with God," he said. "Juan Molinero, you are the king's prisoner. Stand forth!"

"Now!" Borromeo roared, rushing forward, his iron bar lifted high. "If any man touches him I'll burst his head!"

Borromeo was in easy swing of Sergeant Olivera, who paused and drew back before the terrible weapon in the hands of the bristling giant. In his pause, in his moment of open guard, Juan sprang and caught his sword-arm, wringing the weapon from his hand.

Sergeant Olivera leaped back, drawing his pistol, a sharp command on his tongue. The two soldiers leveled their pieces, and Padre Ignacio, his breast heaving, his face tense, his eyes wide in the horror of the growing outrage, rushed between Juan and the threatening guns.

"Peace!" he commanded. "This place must not be profaned with blood. Juan, go with them in peace."

Juan stood a moment, looking at the sword in his hand. He tossed it from him then, with gesture that acknowledged its utter uselessness, as a man throws down a broken tool which has failed him in the moment of his greatest need.

"The irons!" Sergeant Olivera commanded.

"Not here!" Padre Ignacio interposed, stretching his arm to stop the soldier who sprang forward eagerly, the heavy gyves in his hand. "I will guarantee his peaceful and nonresistant passage to the outside. Beyond that, it must be as God wills. That way," to Juan, indicating the vestry door.

Padre Ignacio went beside Juan, the soldiers pressing behind. At the inner door of the vestry, opening close beside the altar, Juan looked back. Gertrudis was on her knees before the altar, her hands clasped to her face, her head bowed in the agony of her supplication. A bright sunbeam, streaming through a tall window, reached near her feet, like a path of golden promise that ended suddenly there, such as the path that

had led them to their plighted word, to plunge them into this sudden abyss of despair.

Outside the vestry door Captin del Valle sat on his horse, his sword-hilt and trappings glittering in the sun. The brim of his broad hat was fastened up with a rosette of gilt cord; the dust of his quick ride from the pueblo, a matter of twenty miles, was heavy on his coat. One soldier was on the ground, holding his companions' horses, one in the saddle near the captain. Four came with Sergeant Olivera conveying the prisoner, and two remained at the front of the church.

Borromeo came last out of the church, and stood with his back against the wall, his iron bar taken from him by Padre Ignacio, turning his eyes with a glowering and savage mien.

"Here is this man whom you have torn from his lawful refuge," Padre Ignacio said, halting with his hand on Juan's shoulder before Captin del Valle. "I have brought him out to prevent the pollution of this sacred place by blood. The most awful penalty that holy church can pronounce rests on the heads of these guilty men who have torn this refugee from the altar. Turn, Captain del Valle, and ride away with these outlaws who have profaned God's house at your command."

"The irons!" said Captain del Valle.

"This is the protest of holy church against your tyranny, Captain del Valle. I shall not surrender this man to your irons."

"You can protest away, then, my good Padre," Captain del Valle said, insolently defiant. "We have what we came for. The irons!"

Two soldiers yielded their pieces to their comrades and laid hold of Juan, to bring his arms behind him to recive the irons. Poor old Padre Ignacio, shocked almost to speechlessness by this barbarous defiance of sacred authority, interposed once more.

"On pain of excommunication——"

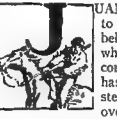
"Peace, old man!" Captain del Valle rudely checked him. "There are no terrors——"

A hiss, like a quick-swing blade cleaving the air; a sharp blow, as a man striking himself with open hand upon the chest. Captain del Valle rose in his stirrups, rigid in a moment of mortal agony, plucking vainly at an arrow that had driven through his breast. Sergeant Olivera sprang to his side, easing him as he fell.

There was a confusion of shouts, of shots at random; a leaping of soldiers to locate the unseen assassin. Juan Molinero flung aside the two men who held his arms, sprang into Captain del Valle's saddle and galloped away.

Chapter XV

Flight and Return



JUAN'S first thought was to fly to the hills directly behind the mission, but when he reached the corner of the church, the hasty shots of the unsteady soldiers singing over his head, he found that road blocked by the two men posted at the front door. Behind him Sergeant Olivera was mounting and calling his men to the pursuit. Juan did not know whether soldiers had been left to watch the mission gate. It was a hazardous chance, but he had no time to linger and debate it. The sound of the pursuing soldiers was loud in the road behind him as he bent low and pressed hard for that one possible exit to the open road.

At that moment he saw Cristobal running, swift as a hare, on an angling course through a little vineyard between the tallow vat and the buildings that flanked the arcade, easily keeping abreast of Juan's galloping horse, shaping his way as if to intercept him presently. Juan knew whose arrow had struck Captain del Valle down in his impious tyranny. He believed now that Cristobal expected to leap up behind him and share his slender chance of escape, and, to aid the young Indian. Juan drew his horse under the arcade and rode in close to the fronts of the little adobe houses along the way.

That moment he saw Padre Mateo at the corner of the main building, where the cart track rounded it to pass the gate. Padre Mateo was beckoning him on, frantically, the sleave of his gown flapping as he waved his arm.

Just here, where Juan expected Cristobal to run out between the houses, Cristobal came galloping on horseback, yelling in the exultant triumph of his wild young soul. He was riding Juan's horse, the fleet black animal taken from Sebastian Alvitre, which he had saddled and stationed in that strategetic point, his plan worked out in the quick comprehension of his agile mind. Sergeant Olivera was not four rods behind them when they swept around the corner of the great mission building and saw the unguarded gate —unguarded but for Padre Mateo.

That honest, rustic-faced priest stood, one half of the ponderous oaken gate closed, the other half-swung, ready to clamp to its fellow the second they were through. Juan saw Padre Mateo's benediction in his eyes as he rode past him, leaning low over the pommel of the saddle, Sergeant Olivera's

pistol balls flying so near he seemed to feel their breath.

When Sergeant Olivera tried to follow he was obliged to pull up hard, and set his horse back in the dust to save himself being pitched over the barred gate. There was an adobe wall ten feet high around the mission grounds at this point; it ran to the corner of the main building on one hand, far along the field-edge on the other. Sergeant Olivera and his soldiers could not ride over it; there was no way around.

They told the story long years afterward: how Padre Mateo held the gate that day until Juan and Cristobal were safe in the bosque in the mountain canyons; how he threaded his arm through the iron brackets that held the great oak bar, telling the soldiers that they must dismember him to open the gate and ride after his oppressed children. Sergeant Olivera, being a reasonable man, turned and rode back to the church, led his men through the little burying-ground at the farther side of it, and took the round-about way to the king's road again. By that time the trail of Juan Molinero and Cristobal was cold in the dust.

Juan Molinero, in the meantime, found himself in the mountains behind the mission. He was mounted on a good horse, provided with a good saddle, with two pistols in the holster at the saddle-horn. There was nothing more. He had no hat, no cloak, no food. He was dressed like a Spanish gentleman, in black silk jacket and buff trousers, and ruffled shirt open at his neck. His red sash was fringed and tasseled with gold thread. It was fit for nothing but to catch in harsh and thorny shrubs and hang up evidence that he had passed that way.

Cristobal was no better provided, aside from his bow and arrows, which were his assurance of sustenance. The young Indian was fully aware that he could not return to his people at the mission, nor remain anywhere within reach of the military in Alta California. There was no refuge for him in Mexico, except perhaps in distant Sante Fe, and there he might stop no longer than his description would be in reaching the soldiers there.

"So, I am going to your country, Juan," he announced; "I am going away with you amd be a man."

Juan agreed that it was the only course open to him to escape punishment, which would be as severe in one case as the other, let Captain del Valle be alive or dead.

"He is dead," Cirstobal declared in proud confidence. "Would I miss a man's heart at fifty yards, Juan?"

Juan knew very well that Cristobal would not miss a mark so fairly presented. Captain del Valle was dead, and in that fact his own peril in California was doubly magnified. No dispensation from the viceroy could exempt him from the charge of complicity in that deed, although he was innocent in intent. He would not have lifted his hand against a soldier in Padre Ignacio's presence.

The two refugees rested in a wooded canyon where night was already deepening, although the peaks of the blasted hills were gray yet in the failing day. Cristobal searched until he found some pieces of hard wood, to be used in the primitive method of making fire, which he tied to his saddle with great satisfaction, saying they would have no fear of means to cook their meat now. For him, the necessities and comforts of a journey, let it be ever so long, were provided.

Juan was of a different mind. He had no reason, certainly, to hold the soldiers in such fear as Cristobal, having never felt their oppression and cruelty as had the Indians who suffered under them. The vigilance of the soldiers and the valor and shrewdness of Sergeant Olivera especially, were not to be lightly dismissed in any case, yet Juan was confident that he could return to the mission for certain imperative reasons which urged him, and depart again undiscovered.

For one thing, he wanted his rifle. Without it on such a journey as lay ahead of him he would feel as hopeless as a man thrust out upon the sea without a plank to sustain him. And there was Gretrudis; she must be comforted and assured. Finally, and not of least importance, there was the map of the old mission trail, with the distance from water to water, and all other essentials of the road, which Padre Ignacio had prepared for him. With this to guide him, he would feel far more confident of reaching the Mississippi.

"Will you go to San Fernando to-night?" Cristobal asked.

"Not to-night, for the soldiers might be expecting me to come back to-night. In the morning we will go farther back among the mountains, and to-morrow night I will return."

Whether Sergeant Olivera had failed to pick up their trail after they left the dusty higway, or whether he had abandoned the pursuit in the early conviction of its utter fatuity, Juan had no choice of conclusion. No soldier had come in sight from the high lookout they kept the next day. At evening Juan was ready for his return to the mission.

Cristobal was to remain at that place in the mountains for three days, unless forced to flee onward from the soldiers, waiting Juan's

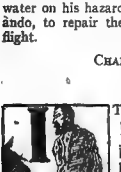
return. At the end of three days, if Juan failed to come back, he was to proceed on his long and lonely seeking after a refuge in an alien land.

Juan gave the young Indian the names of people in Kentucky who would assist him; the little English that Cristobal had learned would further his progress once he reached the country where Spanish would be no longer understood. Juan gave Cristobal the cavalry horse, and one of Captain del Valle's pistols, with half the ammunition.

At twilight Juan rode down the canyon beside the little stream of crystal, turbulent water on his hazardous return to San Fernando, to repair the omissions of his hasty flight.

Chapter XVI

REVOLT



T GLADDENS my heart to see your face again, my Juan, but I would have been better pleased if you had not returned. You have come to look upon insubordination and rebellion, such a state of affairs as never disgraced San Fernando before."

Juan looked sharply at Padre Ignacio when he made this startling declaration of the disorder at San Fernando. There was no evidence of insubordination and rebellion in the quiet night; as he passed the Indians' huts Juan had noted their silence, glad that all seemed to be asleep, disturbed in the fear that they might set up a babble on hearing him pass, and make it necessary for him to ride again for his life.

"It is the quiescence of a covered fire," Padre Ignacio said, reading Juan's doubtful thoughts. "Our poor Indians have thrown off all authority, except alone their spiritual allegiance. This morning they refused to go to the fields, standing under Don Geronimo's lashes sullenly. The cattle and sheep are straying to-night in the hills and vegas without herdsmen or shepherds; the fields are thirsty; the threshed grain lies unwinnowed in the field."

"I am amazed!" said Juan, truly so. "Has there been any violence?"

"No. Brother Mateo and I have succeeded in holding them; they seem like children, indeed, so gentle, so obedient, in our hands. Only they refuse, stubbornly, with such a determination that is almost valiant, to work in the fields under Don Geronimo. They say he was to blame for your betrayal to the soldiers and your flight from San Fernando. They mourn you as a friend lost to them. I do not know how the belief took hold of them, where it started or how it spread, but they think that you were to be mayor-domo in place of Don Geronimo."

"Poor devils!" said Juan, his heart strained with pity for their vain hope.

"We believe, from past experience, that it would be a bad piece of business to yield to them in the slightest point. If they find that rebellion against the hardships—as they believe them, groundlessly—of their material life will result in their alleviation, they will begin to employ the same means to escape the obligations of their spiritual life. A relapse to savagery would be the result; all our labors here among them would be defeated and brought down to nothing."

"It may be so," said Juan, but with doubting reservation.

"The map I prepared for you is here, and your rifle is here. I will help you collect other things necessary, to hasten your departure. You must be well on your way to the mountains again before dawn, but it will be wise to avoid San Gabriel; the soldiers there may be watching for you. Cristobal will be able to find the pass."

"Yes, Cristobal is familiar with the way. But Gertrudis—if I might be permitted a last word with her, to give her assurance——"

"It will be better as it stands," Padre Ignacio interposed hastily, coldly, Juan thought. "She has been asleep long, or, if not, in retirement for the night; it would be impossible to see her now. I will give her every assurance of your safety; I will inform her of your return and departure, well provided against the necessities of your journey home. If God wills it, Juan, you shall come back some day."

"She'll think it strange that I came and went without seeing her," Juan seemed to protest.

"It is past midnight now—too late for lovers to be alone," Padre Ignacio said, smiling a little through his cloud of gloom. He touched Juan's shoulder affectionately, turning him a little to look into his face. "She has been brave; she exulted in your escape," he said. "To see her now, only to leave again, would be more cruel than kind. One parting is only half as hard as two."

"Somebody is coming," Juan said. He rose, anxiously, leaning while he hearkened to the slight whisper of soft-shod feet coming cautiously through the dark under the rafters.

"Brother Mateo," said Padre Ignacio. "It is a time of unrest. Hold the candle to light him, Juan."

"Dona Magdalena!" Juan spoke her name in soft surprise as he opened the door, the candle in his hand.

"I saw by your window that you were not asleep, Padre Ignacio," Dona Magdalena said.

Her great dark eyes sparkled like the eyes of a wild creature in the light; her face seemed hollow and gaunt, with shadows in her cheeks. She looked as if she had come from a troubled vigil, her unbound hair in slight disorder, a few strands of it sweeping her face. She stood in the embarrassment of unexpected discovery, having paused indecisively a moment at the door, its sudden opening revealing her in the troubled state between appeal and flight.

"What is it that brings you from your bed at this hour, my daughter?" Padre Ignacio inquired of her gently.

"Don Geronimo," she said, and paused, lifting her great eyes.

"Has his wound broken, is he sick?" Padre Ignacio asked.

"He heard a commotion among the horses in the corral, it must have been two hours ago," she said. "He went out. He has not come back!"

"He is overdoing himself, I warned him," Padre Ignacio said, out of patience with the mayor-domo. "He has fallen in the ditch, very likely. Come, Juan, let us find him."

"I have looked for him everywhere," Magdalena panted, putting out her hands in gesture of helplessness, of expressive emptiness. "I would not have come to you, only I saw the light."

"Then he has taken a horse to ride out among the cattle," Padre Ignacio assured her, untroubled by her failure to find Don Geronimo. "He is not a man to be looked after like a little child, dona; return to your bed, we shall see what he is about."

They left Magdalena at her door, while they continued on to the corral where the vaqueros commonly kept their horses at night. This was on the river-bank, built in such manner that the beasts could go down to the stream to drink. It was an enclosure between high adobe walls; its openings barred by peeled saplings, smooth-polished from years of use.

"She looked at you as if she believed you had eaten him," Padre Ignacio said, rather sad than indignant to see such suspicion in Magdalena's face. "That is another result of your hasty blow, my son."

"What is this? The horses are all turned out, padre."

The bars were thrown down in the disorder of haste; the corral was empty.

"Where are a woman's eyes that she couldn't see this?" Padre Ignacio wondered. "But why the fellow has turned them out at midnight, and apparently followed them to the pastures, is more than I can understand."

"The saddles are gone from the top of the wall," said Juan. "The horses have not gone away without riders."

"What is this?" said Padre Ignacio, alarmed. But at once he calmed himself by his own reasoning. "Well, it only means that the vaqueros have listened and gone with Don Geronimo to gather up the scattered cattle. That is well; there is no further need for investigation, Juan."

"Who is that?" Juan challenged, seeing a shadowy figure close against the wall. He ran forward; an old Indian stepped out into the moonlight, lifting his hand in the sign of peace.

"Padre Ignacio, a word!" he whispered, beckoning to the priest.

Padre Ignacio turned from a short exchange of words with the Indian, who at once disappeared around the corner of the corral wall.

"He says the young men put a rope around Don Geronimo," said Padre Ignacio, in slow, fatalistic, heartless words. "He says they have carried him away to the hills."

IT IS a bad hour for Don Geronimo," said Juan. "I must follow them; I must stay this awful tragedy!" Padre Ignacio exclaimed.

"Nothing can be done until daybreak, padre. I can pick up the trail at the first light of day, and follow it quickly. Before then we could only stumble and grope."

"I must go at once. There will be something to tell me the way. Your horse—fetch him! I will go at once."

"There are many canyons," Juan pointed to the hills, where the dark gashes of the canyons opened down to the plain. "And see—who is to follow them? Who is to know which way they went over this trampled ground? I have had much experience in these things, padre. I tell you earnestly you will waste time and strength by starting now."

"They will go to San Feliciano Canyon, where the horses stray," Padre Ignacio said, decisively. "I will follow."

"I'll go with you, then. That horse the outlaw owned is a wild creature, and hard to manage at times. I saw your mule in the

pasture by the mill-dam as I passed—he will be safer and more sure. Shall I bring him?"

"Hasten with him, then, Juan."

Juan returned with Padre Ignacio's mule to find the priest in grave contention with his coadjutor over the question of which of them should go on the hazardous business of rescuing Don Geronimo. Padre Mateo argued for the advantage of his years, for his secondary position, which threw the arduous tasks upon him as a matter of right, to all of which Padre Ignacio was deaf.

"It will matter very little what happens to me, Padre Ignacio," Juan heard Padre Mateo say as he came up with the mule, "but everything in San Fernando rests on you. If you should fall——"

"Dismiss the thought! These poor misguided lads would not touch me with violent hand."

"Remember San Diego de Acalá!"

"That was long ago, Brother Mateo."

"But it is the same passion, the same blood."

"Now, Juan, is the girdle tight? That is well." Padre Ignacio put his foot in the stirrup, and laid hold of the saddle-horn to mount, stood so, ready to lift himself to his seat, and turned to Juan. "Go and finish your preparations for departure," he commanded, severely, it seemed to Juan, almost unfriendly and cold.

"But I am going with you," Juan insisted. "It was understood."

"Only by yourself, my son. It is generous of you young men to put your hands to my relief, but another cannot serve in my place in this. Brother Mateo, I charge you to see that Juan does not remain at San Fernando above half an hour from this moment."

He lifted himself to the saddle and rode away, the mule's unshod feet pluffing softly in the deep dust.

"He blames me for this outbreak," Juan said, hurt, sad, to have the old man go with no more kindness in his last word, "when Don Geronimo brought it on his own head."

"His judgment is not to be questioned," Padre Mateo censured him, with sharper word than Juan ever had heard from his lips.

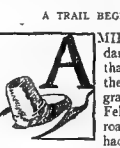
Padre Mateo was waiting beside the door when Juan came down from his room under the eaves, determined, Juan thought, to see that he did not overstay his time. Juan had not been more than fifteen minutes gathering his few necessities; he believed that Padre Mateo had not stirred from his place beside the door.

Juan had his long rifle, and one four-barreled revolving pistol that Padre Ignacio had given him; a generous supply of food, with a few pieces of extra clothing, in a bag to be carried at the cantle of his saddle. He had changed his fine clothes for the rougher garb that he was accustomed to wear at his work in the mill and shops. For convenience in carrying, rather than from the present need of it, he had fastened a long cloak about his shoulders. And so he appeared before Padre Mateo, freighted, bulky with his bag of supplies, his long heavy rifle in his hand.

Padre Mateo lifted his hands; Juan sank to his knee to receive his benediction. When he rose, Padre Mateo embraced him, the words usually so ready on his tongue suppressed by his deeper emotions now. He pressed his face a moment to Juan's shoulder, turned him gently to face away from the mission, and dismissed him without a word.

CHAPTER XVII

A TRAIL BEGINS AND ENDS



A MILE beyond the mill-dam Juan left the trail that ran far back into the mountains to the grazing ground of San Feliciano Canyon, the road that Padre Ignacio had taken in his belief that Don Geronimo's captors had gone that way. Here Juan turned to the eastward, striking a direct course for the place where Cristobal waited his return.

He stopped here a little while, turning in his saddle for a last look at the mission which, he felt in the sorrow of his banishment, he should see no more. He was close by the mountains now; a little while and the canyon would swallow him. With the last sight of San Fernando, since he was not go go by way of San Gabriel now, his eyes would not rest on the dwelling-place of civilized man again in more than two thousand miles.

Juan considered all this with melancholy spirit, more in the sad depression of a man leaving home than one setting his foot forward to it. He finally rode on, with so little heart in his enterprise that he was careless of his bridle reins and almost unseated when his horse shied and bounded with sudden start away from something among the bushes. Juan only glimpsed it, a dark object lying close beside a clump of tall purple sage, but he knew from the animal's alarm that it was something that belonged to and had been handled lately by man. He turned back to investigate, to discover a black hat lying in the trampled trail of several horses which had passed that way only a little while before. Plain as the tracks of the horses were in

the loose earth, Juan would have crossed the trail without marking them, absorbed as he had been in his own affairs. Don Geronimo's peril had been put into the background of his thoughts. Here he could read the danger as plainly as from a printed page. There was no mistaking Don Geronimo's hat with its broad band of silver cloth; there was not another like it at San Fernando. While Padre Ignacio pressed northward into the wooded canyon, Don Geronimo's captors were headed to the south, striking for the mountains called Santa Monica, on the farther side of the broad valley.

Yet it might be that Padre Ignacio had seen this divergence from the expected, and had followed. Juan dismounted for a closer examination of the ground in the open places where the shadows of the bushes did not interfere. There was no mule-track to be found. If Padre Ignacio had come after the horsemen, the distinctive footprint of his animal would have been seen without trouble.

It was but a little way back to the road which these vengeful young men had followed from the mission; Juan back-tracked them, bent on learning beyond any doubt that Padre Ignacio had gone on to the north. If mule-tracks anywhere between there and the beaten road these riders had left proved that Padre Ignacio had picked up the trail, then Juan would have no further duty in the matter, let his misgivings be what they might.

But there was no track of unshod mule in the hoof-torn soft earth. In the dusty main road, white as a trickle of flour over the thirsty land, Juan found the mule's tracks. Padre Ignacio had ridden in haste; it was written there in the dust. Straight on to the north he had gone, unseeing in his fixed belief that those whom he sought continued on before him.

With this discovery, Juan dismounted. He hastily took his sack of provisions from the cantle of his saddle, wrapped his long gray cloak around it and placed it in the branches of a sturdy live-oak tree that stood beside the road. He debated with himself briefly on the question of his firearms, deciding that they must be left behind. Padre Ignacio had missed the object of his quest; he would ride far into the mountains before discovering his mistake. Juan had no doubt of his own duty in this situation; Don Geronimo's hat, dropped unseen by his captors, or carelessly passed as it flew off in his headlong ride, had appealed with tragic eloquence. Yet Don Geronimo's enemies were Juan's friends; he could not pursue them armed.

Two hours before dawn the morning fog blew in from the sea, muffling the moon like a lady's face behind her mantilla, dimming at first, speedily obscuring altogether, the light that had been Juan's guidance in following the vaqueros' trail. He groped along in the gray mistiness, leading his horse, bending low, sometimes feeling the ground for the tracks, only to lose the trail in a cluttered confusion of hoof-prints where a herd of cattle had drifted across it. He waited there, impatient of the delay, his back against the trunk of a tree, while the fog came rolling in, cloud on cloud, the slight breath that carried it damp upon his face.

Juan felt, when morning came as pale and uncertain as light through muddy water, that this delay had eaten up Don Geronimo's doubtful chance of ever returning to San Fernando alive. He did not care so much on Don Geronimo's account; considered from that corner of the situation he was not moved by any sharp twitchings of sympathy. When one thought of Padre Ignacio and Dona Magdalena, it was another thing.

Don Geronimo was a cold and cruel man, yet singularly devoted to the cause of the padres, honest and loyal according to his severe accounting of discipline and service in the name of Our Senor. Considered from the appraisement of his worth as a true and faithful servant, harsh only as he believed it necessary, cruel only in the age-old oppression of master over slave, not singular in that respect to hundreds of men in Juan's own Virginia and Kentucky, considered in this light, Don Geronimo probably was worth saving for himself.

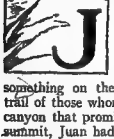
If he could deliver Don Geronimo from the vengeance of the young men and see him faced again safely toward San Fernando, he could turn to his own banishment with a lighter heart, knowing that the blessing of Padre Ignacio and Dona Magdalena would follow him, multiplied by a thousand gratitudes. There was no selfish thought in his breast of winning absolution, of quieting the feud between him and Don Greonimo, or gaining a revocation of the edict which sent him forth like one disowned.

The trail led across the little river which came down from San Fernando, several miles below the mission. From that point it bore toward the pass leading across into the valley of San Gabriel. It was plain going here; the mayor-domo's captors were carrying him toward a mountain that flanked the pass on the east.

This mountain rose out of the valley abruptly, without the gradation of preliminary hills, almost precipitously on the side which Juan was approaching. It was an

ill-shaped eminence, its sides dark with the greenery of laurel and sage and chaparral, its summit divided into two knobs, standing perhaps half a mile apart. These topmost heights were rocky and bare, in spite of the beneficent fogs which swathed the valley at this time of the year, keeping the northern slopes of the mountains green.

Juan drew rein as he came clear of the tall wide-spreading oaks which grew in luxuriance close against the foot of this mountain, standing in a little open space from which he had a clear view of the forbidding dark mountain's double hump. The rising sun was routing the fog out of the valley; the shrubbery around him was dripping as from a shower. The summit of the mountain was sharp against the clear sky, stalks of yucca, from which the bloom had long since withered, standing like spears out of the barrens and ledges from which they grew. On the summit of the eastern peak a horse was standing. Juan could see its head lifted above the shrubs which hemmed the little rocky islet of the top. It was unmistakably plain, although it must have been more than a mile away.



JUAN could not see anything of the animal but the head and neck, lifted in the posture of sharp attention as if the creature had caught an alarm, or stood watching the movement of something on the opposite slope. As the trail of those whom he sought led on into a canyon that promised to offer a way to the summit, Juan had no doubt that this horse was from San Fernando, and that the others, and their riders, with the unhappy Don Geronimo, were close by.

There was no road, no trace or mark of any way frequented by man, in the canyon through which Juan followed the track of those who bore Don Geronimo to the reckoning of his cruel years. Here the riders had been forced to scatter, each finding a way for himself through the close-grown thickets of chaparral. It was slow going; more than an hour of winding and forging through the rough tangle, where harsh branch and bramble laid hold of every fold and wrinkle in a man's garment and sought to hold him back, brought Juan only fairly into the shadow of the mountain. The trail of those he followed was rounding the base of the hill, while it mounted always on an oblique course that was making for the top.

The sun was three hours high when Juan mounted out of the canyon and stood on the western shoulder of the mountain, in a meadow now yellow with the dry stalks of wild oats. From this point he could not see the peak toward which he was directing his efforts, although he was confirmed in his conclusion that this knob, the highest point of the mountain, had been the vaqueros' objective. Their trail continued on, angling sharply up the mountainside, appallingly steep here, and grown over with a tangle of low shrubs which seemed almost impenetrable.

A little below the level on which he stood and ahead of him a considerable distance, Juan could see a tall pillar of vaporous smoke, yellowish-white with a tint of green, such as the woodsman at once knows is fed by living vegetation. A slow and languid fire, Juan thought; doubtless in the clearing of some settler, who heaped it with green boughs. He went on, uneasy to be riding on that slope, steep as a house roof, where a stumble might send horse and man rolling down through the scrawny bushes.

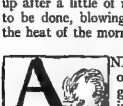
The horse that Sebastian Alvitre had ridden in his outlawed days was well accustomed to that kind of work. He went about it with surprising security and quickness of foot, although the labor of it was heavy. Juan was nothing extraordinary as a rider, knowing little about easing or sparing his mount in such a place as this, yet his sympathies were keen, to such a degree, that he drew up and dismounted as the passage grew steeper, with the intention of hitching the horse to a shrub and going afoot the remainder of the way.

He was astonished at this point to notice the growth of the fire. In the half hour that he had been toiling up the slope it had spread from its point of beginning to a long front which was girding the mountain. It was still too far away to give him much concern; it must eat its way through the green brush, tall and dense below him, thicker and greener a little way ahead. But it was making a tremendous smoke, and the outrunning spread of it was mystifying.

It might be that the Indians not attached to the mission—a tribe lived there in the vivinity of the pass, he knew—were setting the fire to drive out rabbits, according to their custom at that time of the year. It seemed an unlikely place for such a sport, yet it was certain that somebody was extending the fire line. There was little wind; the smoke rose high, so dense that the view of the distant San Gabriel Valley was cut off. All the world visible to Juan was that gray-green mountainside between the fire and the top.

If the wind should rise, the blaze might run up the mountain to that point before he could explore the top and return, although it seemed unlikely that fire could find a foothold among the melancholy greenery of that slope. Again, he might need the horse to follow the trail, in case Don Geronomo's captors had crossed the summit and gone on. He did not believe this to be the case; they had struck for the mountain top with definite intention, perhaps associated with some tradition of sacrifice or vengeance, or celebration of victory such as they doubtless considered this to be over their persecutor, the mayor-domo of San Fernando.

Leading the horse, Juan scrambled on, the beast lumbering after him in the peculiarly ungainly heaves and jumps by which a horse takes a steep. This was an uncomfortable proceeding at a man's heels, with only the length of the reins between. Juan pulled up after a little of it, considering what was to be done, blowing from the exertion and the heat of the morning sun.



AND more than the heat of the sun. The fire had grown almost past belief in these few minutes. There was a pitchy blackness in the smoke close to the ground, and glimpses through it of fire that leaped like spume of breaking seas. The wind was beginning to stir, called up by the heat; it flattened the smoke against the mountain, and bent the points of flame down to catch the tops of those stolid, harsh-leaved shrubs, the names of which Juan did not know, but the nature of which now became appallingly apparent. Each leaf, each somnolent, scraggly shrub, became a torch at the touch of fire. They were full of resinous substances and strange oils, the perfume of their burning sweet as incense.

Juan looked anxiously toward the mountain top, not far away, but circled with a band of vigorous shrubs as though some ooze of water came out of the rocks to gladden their roots. The steepest part of it lay ahead of him. But it was evident that those whom he trailed had ridden up it. He could do no less.

The horse was uneasy; Juan felt it tremble as he put foot in the stirrup. Eager to be away out of the march of that panic-striking thing that crunched dry branches and roared in green boughs, the creature lunged and lurched up the steep. In a breath the smoke had become as thick as the morning fog, and hotter than the noontime sun of San Fernando. Still Juan was not anxious over his own situation. The top of the peak for which he was bound had appeared rocky and bare from a distance; the fire would fall at its edges; there he could wait until it had stripped the mountain and died out, as it must do quickly, urged on by the growing wind.

It had grown to be a gale of fire on the mountainside before Juan reached the summit, the wind from it so hot that the skin puckered and drew and the eyeballs burned in dry sockets. All the surface moisture evaporated out of a man at the touch of that fiery hurricane, which whistled through the manzanita, sowing smoking twigs for the hasty harvest of flame.

Juan's great concern had come suddenly to center on himself. Grave peril had leaped up out of that lazy cloud of brushwood smoke, beside which Don Geronimo's was scarcely greater. Across the ridge of the mountain Juan believed he would be safe from this driving storm of fire, which he calculated would spend itself for want of fuel when it reached the top. Don Geronimo's captors would have fled to safety; there would be nobody on the mountain top for him to rescue but himself, and from the way things looked and felt at that moment, he would have quite enough to do to accomplish that.

The fire was more than half-way up the mountain when Juan's horse scrambled up the last steep to the top. Looking back, Juan saw the forerunning surge of flame leaping from bush to bush, thicket to thicket, in a wild, avid, happy madness, a greedy delight of destruction, it seemed. Far below, as the smoke broke for an instant and showed him the yellow-brown meadow of wild oats, he saw a man running with a brand of fire. It was only a glimpse, sharp, clear, distinct; the trailing torch draggling in the grass as the man ran, the quick-springing flame that followed.

There was no security on the summit at that point. Here the long ridge of the mountain ran between the two humps, clothed over with a dense growth of sage and dwarfed laurel, the cedar-green of manzanita clumped here and there, every plume of it primed with its inflammable oils, wating to vanish in a whistling roar at the first touch of flame. Juan pushed across the ridge, thinking to ride down out of that withering blast of fire, knowing that it could not run down this lee side as rapidly as it had pursued him upward on the slope at his back.

His hope was cut off by a drop almost perpendicular. Not a ledge, but a brush-

grown steep, so tangled with interlacing growth that a stone scarcely could have rolled down, it appeared. Juan hastened on to the peak where he had seen the horse. The vaqueros would have gone at the first sight of the fire; it was his hope that he might follow their trail to safety.

What had appeared a barren spot from the valley, here proved to be some sort of winter-growing plant that had matured and turned brown. It stood thick on the slope of the peak, kindling spread ready for the advancing fire. At the summit there was a small clear space, indeed, and here lay rocks red from the passing of old fires, which had streamed across them on such a wind as this. Here Juan paused a moment. The horse that he had seen must have been on this point; from here the trail that he must follow led away.

Juan could not discover any tracks from the saddle, his eyes parched by the searing wind and smoke. He dismounted, sheltering himself in the lee of his horse. There they had passed; the hoof-prints were dim in the hard earth. On again, on foot, pressing close against his horse's side, almost strangled, his windpipe a streak of fire. Over the summit he plunged down into a jungle of manzanita, which grew there taller than he ever had seen it, at least twice the height of a man.

Here the hot blast of wind was broken by the thickets, the smoke was not so stifling and dense. Juan paused to breathe a moment, gasping, spent. He moistened his finger-tip in his mouth and rubbed his burning eyes, searching again for trace of the passage the others had made through the thicket.

A horse was standing almost within arm's length of him. It was tied to a stout manzanita by bridle reins and lariat around its neck, hopelessly fastened in the track of the approaching fire. On the ground beside it lay the saddle it had worn, and the sheepskin that had been used for a pad; on its back there was bound another burden, as terrible to see as ever shocked the eyes of man.

Chapter XVIII

Darkness and Flame

DON GERONIMO had been beaten hideously. He lay bound to the back of the horse, his face against its neck, as he evidently had been placed to receive the punishment that had been applied by unsparing hands. Yet not altogether unsparing, for Don Geronimo still lived, although he had not been spared in mercy but in calculated cruelty, that he might be conscious of the end most dreaded by all living things.

It seemed that a thousand blows had fallen on his back, stripped naked to the waist. He was a pulp of purple, horribly gashed flesh. Blood from his wounds had drenched the horse's sides and stained the dry earth. His castigators had calculated nicely the load of torture the human frame could bear. When Don Geronimo had fainted from the pain, Juan gathered from the evidence at hand, they had drenched his head with water to bring him back to life. His hair was still wet; he lay bound so tightly, hands clasping the horse's neck, feet drawn under its girth, that he could move nothing but his eyes.

Juan was so shaken by the disturbing sight that he stood for a moment inactive.

"Don Geronimo, Don Geronimo!" he called.

Don Geronimo could not move his head to see who it was that spoke in pity. He could only roll his eye, even that slight exertion seeming to rend his body with pain. He did not speak; his great agony had not left him even a groan. Juan cut his bonds and lifted him from the horse, believing him on the verge of death. Don Geronimo lay limp in Juan's arms, staring without sense or thought, into his face. The overseer's throat constricted; his jaw sagged.

"I am a dead man, Juan," Don Geronimo said in a husky whisper. "Save yourself from the fire—go!"

"Can you ride, Don Geronimo?"

"I can only die," Don Geronimo answered, bitter for his own weakness. "The fire is near—ride, Juan, ride for your life! Mine is done."

He sank to the ground, closing his eyes, the last of his strength consumed in these words. Juan threw the sheepskin on the horse, lifted Don Geronimo to it in the position he had lain before, and bound him there. The horse was restive; it braced its legs and tugged to break loose, snorting in fear of the fire.

The creature's sudden panic struck Juan's horse like a contagion. Up to that moment it had stood where Juan had dropped the reins, confident in the wisdom of its master, unshaken in the menace of the fiery storm from which, left to its own resources, it would have fled. Juan sprang to secure it to a shrub; it reared as he reached for the dangling reins, snorted a blast of terror, dashed away into the brush. Juan ran after it, his reason dispersed almost as completely as the horse's

by this sudden calamity. The roar of the fire drowned his voice; the horse was lost to sight in the swirl of driving smoke.

Don Geronimo appeared to be unconscious, lying nerveless as the dead with closed eyes and sagging head. Juan twisted the bridle reins around his hand and plunged off in the direction his own horse had gone, the frantic creature that carried Don Geronimo struggling to pass him and tear free. It required all his strength to hold the horse, which dashed through the thick brushwood, dragging him after it. A branch took his hat; he had neither time nor power to stop and recover it, but he was assured by the determination of the horse to go in that direction that a way to safety lay ahead.

This belief was wrenched out of him in a moment when his own horse came running wildly back. Juan called to it, tried to to throw himself in front of it and stop it. The mad creature swerved, broke past him with a crash in the tangled brushwood, and was gone.

Juan turned to follow, knowing that fire must have cut off its escape. He must go back along the ridge toward the western point, looking for an opening, no matter how steep it might be or how desperate the chance of passing it, as long as it would let them down the northern side of the mountain to the security of the valley. The tangle of brushwood limbs tore Don Geronomo's wounds, starting them to bleeding again. Whether he was conscious of this added torture Juan did not know, but he was assured by the flow of blood that Don Geronimo was still alive. He tore off his jacket and struggled with the crazy horse while he fastened it over Don Geronimo's bleeding back. On again, retracing the way he had come.

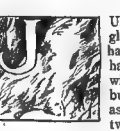
A blast of hot wind struck him as he left the shelter of the manzanita thicket, staggering him, setting him back momentarily blinded and gasping. It was a breaker of fire, a surge of stifling smoke streaked with flying points of flame. As he left the shelter of the manzanita jungle this out-running wave of fire caught it, leaping high, rolling a sudden burst of black smoke as from a broadside of cannon-shots.

Juan bent against the hurricane that swept the mountain top, struggling blindly on, the horse singularly passive beside him. Its panic seemed to have given way to a trembling paralysis of fear in which it realized that a greater intelligence would guide it through the wild sowing of fire. Juan felt the skin of his face tighten, the hiss of fire as it crinkled his hair. The horse was singed, Don Geronimo's beard was smoking as Juan pressed against him to break the fire from his face.

Across the mountain top the fire was farther down the slope. Here the air was clearer, although little brands were kindling the brown vegetation that not long ago had been a mass of yellow bloom. Juan's horse came galloping back from its frantic seeking to the westward, its hide singed bare in spots, its saddle leather smoking, the stirrups thrashing its sides in wild spurring on this desperate race.

The mad creature wheeled as it faced the turmoil of fire from the burning flowers, to rush to the northern slope, where it paused, its forelegs thrust out stiffly to check its plunge over the rim. Juan made another vain effort to catch the beast, which burst away at his approach. Back and forth in the short clear space of the mountain ridge the wild thing galloped, rushing in eager seeking to the north slope again. A moment it scrambled there, forefeet over the edge, then plunged out of sight.

Had it found a way down, a desperate, perilous way? Juan hurried to the spot to see. The horse was rolling down the steep, crashing through brushwood, dashing over sharp edges, trailing a frightful way that living man could not follow. On again, they went the horse that carried Don Geronimo humping its back as if it faced a wintry storm, its nose close to the ground, shrinking as near Juan as it could press, companion indeed of his miserable situation.



JUAN felt that this mangled ending his horse had made would be happy in comparison with the thing he faced, but it could be reserved as the final choice between the two. A little way beyond where his horse ended its torture in the desperate chance that failed, a canyon scarred the southern side of the mountain. The draft of this place was like a chimney, the roar of the fire in it equal to a cataract. Glimpses that he caught beyond that point gave Juan the hope that his way to life might be found on that side of the mountain, even in the face of the fire.

The horse hung back when they came to the head of the canyon, where a cloud of fiery smoke rushed across the mountain ridge as from a bellows. Juan stripped off his outer shirt, wrapped it around Don Geronimo's head and face, held his breath, crouched low and plunged into it, dragging the horse after

him. This furnace blast was not more than twenty yards across, perhaps, but it was almost a sheet of flame. Only the tremendous draft, which shot the blaze high, gave them a passage with a scorched remnant of life.

The shirt around Don Geronimo's head was blazing when they burst through to the comparative clearness beyond the canyon; his beard crumbled under Juan's hand as he tore the cloth away. The sheepskin was burning; Don Geronimo's nether clothing, all that he wore, smoked in many spots. Juan crushed the fire out in his hand, blistering fingers and palms. His own raiment was picked with a score of spreading fire-spots. He rolled on the ground to smother them, the bridle reins turned securely around his arm.

He staggered up, and on a little way, pausing to drag his hands over his face, in which there was a harsh feeling of incineration. His eyebrows and lashes were gone; his beard was only hard stumps; when he touched his hair it broke like glass and vanished. But he breathed again, he stood erect, and hope unfolded at his feet.

Here the side of the mountain was mangy and almost bare. Below him the burned patch of wild oats lay black; a weak line of fire was clambering up the slope, leaping on the wind from bush to bush, clump to clump. If he could pass the thicker fringe of bushes along the ridge before the fire had sprung that high, he could continue down without more risk. It was steep going. The horse, almost blinded by the last dash, stumbled insecurely after him. Whether Don Geronimo still lived there was no telling.

How viciously those unlikely shrubs blazed! What a torch sprang out of every drab gray sage! Juan met the line of fire where yucca stalks stood among manzanita and sage not much higher than his knees, sparse and sad and drouth-cursed, but more eager to burn, it seemed, for their very insignificance. The fire sprang from them into his face in vicious gusts, and the horse, unable to stand the charge, turned to lumber up the mountain.

Juan stopped the beast after a doubly perilous struggle on the precarious slope, and stood bending over Don Geronimo, shielding him with his body from the fire. It was only a gust; in a moment it had stripped the leaves from the miserable shrubs and roared on like a little whirlwind on a summer day. They passed through this without much damage, and went on down among the black, smoking sticks of laurel and gnarled manzanita, and gray-green clumps of spiked yucca, which looked little worse for the passing of the quick-leaping line of fire.

Juan found the spring in the pass called Cahuenga, where they had spread their dinner the day he rode as guard to Gertudis Sinova. There he bathed Don Geronimo's wounds, grateful to find him breathing strongly, testimony of the strength of the indomitable race whence he sprang. Juan feared the mayordomo might die without surgical attention, such as Padre Ignacio could give him, if left there by the roadside long. He considered going on with him, cruel as it would be to Don Geronimo to bind him to the horse again, his excoriated back to the sun.

Juan himself was in poor case for traveling. Although he had closed his eyes against the fire in his long dash through it on the ridge, all but a little crevice to give himself a dim guidance, his blistered forehead and cheeks were puffing out of all human semblance, threatening soon to eclipse his sight entirely. A blind man and an unconscious man would be but a poor pair of traveling companions for the fifteen miles or more between there and San Fernando.

This was the Camino Real a highway much frequented. Perhaps the soldiers might pass that way, or some traveler who would hurry on to San Fernando and send help. The wisest thing was to wait at the spring, where the blessing of cold water was to be enjoyed by stretching out the arm.

Don Geronimo had not suffered from the fire as much as Juan. Aside from the shortening of his beard, his face bore little mark of the flames. Juan had spread the sheepskin and his scorched jacket for Don Geronimo's bed beside the spring. He dipped water in his hands and poured it over his bruised, galled back. Juan's labor was rewarded.

In a little while Don Geronimo sighed, opened his eyes, tried to speak. Juan poured water on his lips, lifted him to lean against his shoulder while he offered water in his cupped hand. Don Geronimo drank thristily, the draught seeming to restore his wasted blood.

"So I live," he said, his voice hoarse and low. "They would have burned me; they left me with a taunt to set the fire."

"Spare yourself, Don Geronimo," Juan cautioned. "I think I hear a cart; you will need your strength for the long ride home."

Fabio Dominguez, the rancher of the San Pedro Road, was on his way to San Fernando that morning to buy flour. He was not concerned with the burning mountain, that being a sight common enough in his experience. So long as the fire did not block his

road he gave it little thought, but his eyes were like peeled eggs at the sight of the two battered, disfigured men beside the spring.

"WHAT is this, in God's name!" said Dominguez, standing on the footboard of his cart, his long whip looped in his hand.

"There is a gentleman here who has met a sad misfortune," Juan explained." If you will carry him to San Fernando, you will be rewarded."

"I am on my way to San Fernando," said Dominguez, coming down cautiously out of the cart, as if wary of some trick. "Who is he you want me to take? God save me! What is the matter with his back?"

"It is I, Geronimo Lozano. You will lose nothing, Dominguez, in this."

Dominguez came nearer, bending over Don Geronimo, still with the quick-set way about him of a creature ready to spring and run away. Weak as was Don Geronimo's voice Dominguez had heard it perfectly; yet he was not convinced.

"Don Geronimo? It is a strange thing," he said.

"He has met an adventure such as only Don Geronimo could pass through and live. Help me break some boughs to make a springy bed for him in the bottom of your cart. We will cover them with your sacks, there will be others to replace them at the mission."

"And who are you?" Dominguez asked, his best foot set to spring back into the cart at the first false start.

"It is another thing," Juan returned, coldly.

"Are you of the mission?"

"I am not of the mission."

"Well, you are a thing to make a man forget his dinner!" Dominguez declared. "Have you come through the fire on the mountain?"

"We have. At San Fernando, Don Geronimo will tell you what there is for your ears to hear. Assist me; let us be quick."

While Don Geronimo's strength was little more than a shred when they lifted him to the cart and stretched him on the springy couch of boughs, he held himself braced on his elbow a moment and took Juan's hand.

"Don Juan, you have suffered much for an unworthy man," he said. "I pray for a happier day to requite you."

"It is nothing," said Juan. "Dominguez, will you lend me a jacket? I cannot promise to return it, or to pay you for it soon. Don Geronimo will be my surety."

"I have but the one, and this cloak, with me," Dominguez said, very doubtfully. "A man hesitates——"

"A meal sack, then," Juan said, impatiently.

"That is very well," Dominguez agreed, relieved by the easy bargain. "Here is a big one—now, a little minute and I will make you a shirt and a coat in one."

He cut a slit for the head to pass in the bottom, slits for the arms, and handed it to Juan with a laugh.

"I will not need surety for that," he said, "but when we get to San Fernando I will expect a good one in exchange."

"All will be well with you now, Don Geronimo," Juan assured him, bending over the mayordomo in his ridiculous smock. It was little wonder that Dominguez had not recognized him; it is a question whether Padre Ignacio himself would have done better at that moment.

"You will sit in the cart. Turn the horse loose to follow if it will," Don Geronimo said.

"I have lost my own horse; this one I shall need for the journey that lies ahead of me."

"You are not going with me to San Fernando?"

"It cannot be, Don Geronimo."

"Ah, I remember!" said Don Geronimo, his words a groan. "But that is the past; it is forgotten."

"That horse is only good for the wolves," Dominguez announced, after looking the creature over. "He is blind; the eyes have been burned out of him. If you have far to go, my friend, I'd advise you to get another one. See!"

Dominguez struck at the horse, close before its eyes. It stood quite unconscious of the menace of his hand.

"It is true," Juan admitted.

"Yes, and you are little better off, Dominguez declared, a rough sort of pity in his manner." Jump in now, little man, and I'll land you in San Fernando in two hours."

Juan was reluctant to go in the cart, but there was no other way. He feared that it would appear to those at San Fernando that he was making capital out of such service as he had given Don Geronimo in his hour of peril, a thing that bent down his spirit and humbled his soul to contemplate.

"The misfortune of my situation, Don Geronimo, forces me to do a thing that my manhood revolts against," he said.

Dominguez heard this with amazement,

turning on the seat of his cart to look at Juan, standing by the tail-board in such woful plight that it would seem a blessing, rather than an indignity to be offered a ride in a cart.

"Don Juan Mealsack, you are a strange animal," he said. "In with you, now, and arrange the canvas to break the sun from Don Geronimo."

"In God's name, Dominguez, drive fast!" Don Geronimo groaned, lying face downward on his bed of boughs.

Juan was concerned gravely over his own condition. His heavy undergarment had protected his arms and chest, but his neck and face seemed cooked, puffed in places with dropsical distensions, skinless and raw in others. His hands were in no better case; his legs were scorched and blistered in spots where his pantaloons had burned through. These things he could have borne with no more than passing concern, as, indeed they were secondary to the injury his eyes had suffered. But the thought that he might lose his vision was a terrifying one which made his courage falter in a sweat of dreadful apprehension.

Don Geronimo did not know, Dominguez had not understood, that Juan had seen but dimly when he broke the leafy tips of branches from oak and sycamore for the mayordomo's bed; or that this obscruation grew with alarming rapidity, as an eclipse seems to rush to its climax. The inflammation was mounting in pulsating pangs that pierced his brain like exploring instruments in a cruel surgeon's hands. When they left the shadow of the oaks around the spring and entered the glaring sun on the white road, the canvas cover of Dominguez's cart seemed a poor shelter against the piercing rays.

Juan sat with hands pressed to his burning eyeballs. He had no spare garment to wet in the spring and carry with him; his jacket, rough as it was, he had drenched at the last moment and spread over Don Geronimo's back. He could do no more than close his burned lids tightly, bow his head in the shade of Dominguez's canvas, hold back his groans and hope all was not lost of the most precious sense that comes from the mysterious Source.

Dominguez drove fast where the road would permit, and in the main it was smooth, the wheel-jolt cushioned by thick dust. If Don Geronimo's sufferings were increased by the motions of the cart those who shared it with him were not enlightened by so much as a groan. Fast as they traveled, it was nearer three hours than two before they reached San Fernando. Juan heard the midday bell striking before they stopped at the gate.

"What is this?" said Dominguez, impatiently. "The gate is closed. A man would think the padres were afraid of an insurrection. So it is you, Padre Mateo, that is warder to-day?"

"Drive in, Dominguez," Juan heard Padre Mateo direct.

"Here are the two most sorrowful men that I ever have seen in my days," said Dominguez, coming to the end of the cart the moment it stopped in the court. "You will need help, Padre Mateo, to get one of them to his bed."

"What is this?" Padre Mateo demanded, his head thrust in the cart-end.

"It is I, Geronimo Lozano, and the man who has delivered me from death," Don Geronimo was quick to answer in voice surprisingly strong.

Juan, hands pressed to his burning eyes, felt the movement as Don Geronimo struggled to lift his head.

"And who, in God's name, is he?" Padre Mateo asked, shocked by the sight of so much misery as they presented.

"It is Juan Molinero, God's blessing on his head!" Don Geronimo replied.

"Come down Juan—come down," Padre Mateo said.

"Assist Don Geronimo; his need is greater than mine," Juan returned.

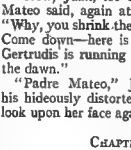
Padre Mateo called to some who stood in wondering silence near at hand, with directions for carrying Don Geronimo to his house. Dona Magdalena ran to meet them; Juan heard her sharp cry of piteous dismay.

"Now, Juan, let us see to you," Padre Mateo said, again at the tail of the cart. "Why, you shrink there like a man ashamed! Come down—here is my hand. See where Gertrudis is running to greet you, quick as the dawn."

"Padre Mateo," Juan said, uncovering his hideously distorted face, "I shall never look upon her face again. I am blind!"

CHAPTER XIX

SO ENDS THIS DAY



PADRE MATEO heard this melancholy declaration with a sinking heart. He stood a moment looking with horror on the disfigurement of what had been but a few hours before a handsome, frank-faced man, to turn away quickly and almost run to stop Gertrudis in her eager coming.

"I have sent her away to wait a little while, Juan," he said, returning presently. His

voice was hushed, awed; as if he spoke to one dying, to whom the things of life were only trivialities. "You are no sight for a woman's eyes, your body half naked. She understands; she will wait."

"I will go inside with you, then," said Juan.

Padre Ignacio had not returned from his blind dash into the mountains; the care of the two suffering men rested in Padre Mateo's hands alone, and he was uncertain in his mind which was the graver case and in the more pressing need of attention. Juan solved the doubt for him the moment Padre Mateo opened the door of the little room under the eaves which he never had expected to enter again.

"Leave me now, Padre Mateo, and attend to Don Geronimo," he requested. "If you will send me a pitcher of water and a cloth to lay over my eyes, I'll be very comfortable until my turn arrives."

"I have a doubt between you, Juan," Padre Mateo hesitated.

"My injuries are not mortal, nor in any danger of turning out half that bad," Juan replied, pushing Padre Mateo's shoulder gently to hasten him on his duty. "Don Geronimo's life is wasting in a hundred streams; the blood must be stopped, the poison checked in his wounds."

"Yes, it is a grave condition," Padre Mateo admitted, "a sight that wrings the heart. But I may be an hour, or longer, over Don Geronimo."

"Take the rest of the day if you need it. Put me out of your thoughts—only for the water and the cloth."

"A little longer does not matter so greatly with a burn," Padre Mateo said, yielding against his desire, for his sympathy lay with his affection, and there was not a warm spot in his heart for Don Geronimo.

Padre Ignacio returned before his coadjutor had completed his plastering and piecing of Don Geronimo's stripes. The sound of his voice in the door was as comforting to Juan as a mother's to a fevered child. Still he suffered a doubt that his excuse for returning to San Fernando might not suffice, or might be taken as a plea and a justification for a desired reward.

"You see me here again, like a dog that can't be kicked from the door," Juan said, rising at the priest's kind word of greeting.

"You had no choice, with your sufferings upon you, but to come back, my poor Juan," Padre Ignacio replied. "I must open the shutters to have the light—can you bear it?"

"In a day or two I'll go on again, this time for good," Juan persisted in his effort to be understood. "If I am not able to see my way, I only ask you to let one of the young men guide me to Cristobal, who is waiting for me in the mountains."

Padre Ignacio turned from the little window set low in the north wall, placed his hand on Juan's shoulder and pressed him gently into his chair.

"You shall not leave San Fernando again, my son, unless the vengeance of the soldiers drives you away," Padre Ignacio said. He drew Juan's head back and pressed the swollen flesh from his eyes, saying nothing until he had completed the examination. "Don Geronimo has told me all," he said, the weight of sufficiency in his tone.

"I would not have followed them, but I found Don Geronimo's hat and saw that you had missed the trail."

"A deed of mercy needs no plea of justification in my ears," the priest answered. "Do you feel the light?"

"It is like a spike driven in my eyes!"

"You must suffer like a hero; you must pay a hero's price."

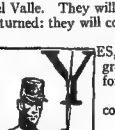
"Shall I see again?"

"That is in God's hands."

Juan's hope fell away again, sinking as water vanishes in sand. Padre Ignacio was cutting away the mealsack shirt, touching his burns with exploring finger as they were revealed. He stretched Juan on his rawhide bed and washed his injuries, bringing him immeasurable relief. As he worked he talked lightly of his expedition into the mountains on a false trail, while he applied soothing oils to Juan's burns, and cooling lotion to his eyes, working quickly, deft in his long years of practice in healing the physical as well as the spiritual afflictions of mankind.

"Now, I have wrapped you like a mummy," he said at last, "and here you must lie, in darkness of a dungeon until the inflammation subsides out of your eyes. Until that time, we shall not know."

"I suppose the military authorities will hold me to blame for the death of Captain del Valle. They will soon know that I have returned: they will come for me."



"YES, Juan, your peril is far greater than ever before."

"And when they come?"

"They must wait. Sergeant Olivera is a reasonable man; he will not expect to tear you away in this sorrowful condition. A guard will be posted, yet there are means of passing a guard. All depends, in the last moment, on your eyes."

"Is there a hope that I may see again?"

"There is always hope."

Little comfort for Juan in the hollow platitude.

"Padre Ignacio?" he said hopelessly.

"My son."

"There is Gertrudis—I cannot hold her to her promise now. I shall be hideous in my scars, I shall be—I shall be—blind. Tell her I release her and ask her to forget me."

Padre Ignacio did not reply at once. He was silent so long, indeed, that Juan read in it the sentence of eternal blackness, the confirmation of his deepest fear. When Padre Ignacio spoke, his voice was low, and distant, it seemed to Juan, as a voice heard at eventide from the hill.

"In a few days, when the swelling of your face has fallen, she shall come with me and sit beside you, Juan," he said. "Until then, permit your words to lodge with me unrepeated."

"As you say," Juan yielded, holding his answer a long time. "But spare her the sight of me, Padre Ignacio, until my face has gone back to as much of its original shape as it ever will bear again. It would be repellant to her; she never could forget. I beg you not to permit any of them, except Padre Mateo, to come near me while I am in this puffed and hideous condition."

"Perhaps it would be better so. A sensitive mind retains the memory of such unhappy sights—I understand your argument, Juan. I shall assume the care of you myself, permitting nobody else to enter your chamber until you are restored to your familiar appearance."

Juan heard him moving softly about the room, placing the bandages and medicaments outside the door, making a subdued noise with sash and shutter at the window. He came back to Juan's side to stand for a moment with hand lightly laid on his bandaged eyes, saying no audible word. Then he went away.

For a long time Juan lay as Padre Ignacio left him, shut in his little room, listening to the sounds that came up from the court, so distinct that he knew the father had left the folding window open, drawing only the shutters. There was a dove among the olive trees by the river, singing the few sad notes that sounded like the burden of a viol above the lesser instruments too far away to be heard; and the tinkle of sheep bells where the creatures came crowding in from the distant grazing-lands to drink.

Around the mission itself there was little activitity. Dominguez had loaded his cart and gone away; Juan heard Borromeo hammering intermittently at his anvil, and thought, now and then in the silences, he could catch the cool plash of the fountain where the white roses clambered over the trellis, out of reach of a maiden's hand.

Gertrudis might be there by the fountain, where the shade would be falling now, looking to his window, wondering how he fared; the soldiers might be at the mission gate, barring his way even to the blank, dark life beyond the mission walls. He was involved in a confusion of fevered speculations, conjectures, fancies; they eluded his reason, flying in blurring swirl that sickened him, oppressing him with such misery as falls on a man only when he stands in the very penumbra of death.

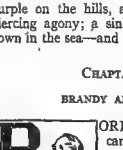
Gertrudis, Gertrudis! She was torn from him in the confusion of reeling fragments into which his world had burst; she was swept out of his reach forever, her face white as it floated by, white as foam on the outrunning tide, white as a rose on the trellis by the fountain.

Padre Ignacio returned, bringing a lull in this awful hurrying of his life's wreckage by his simple presence within the door. He spoke softly, his hand on Juan's wrist, on his bosom where the fire had not licked him raw with its avid tongue. Padre Ignacio gave him a bitter drink. There was a slackening in the sickening tide that swirled the broken bits of his life; there was a slowing to a pause.

After a little the sweet tone of the vesper bell came to him, tremulous, restful, but faint as if it carried on the wind from distant places. There was a thought of the sun purple on the hills, and a surcease of the piercing agony; a sinking, as of one going down in the sea—and sleep.

CHAPTAR XX

BRANDY AND COFFEE



BORROMEO CAMBON came to the kitchen at evening of that notable day in the history of San Fernando, to get a mouthful of the dainties which Magdalena had been all day preparing for the feast. It was not often in the life of a man of even such importance as the king's blacksmith that he came to share the provender of a governor. True, the governor was dining in the refectory with the padres, but the nearer to the source of luxury a man can seat himself, the greater his advantage. So Borromeo, in his philosophy, consoled

himself for a place and a platter at the kitchen table.

Dona Magdalena never had appeared so fair in Borromeo's eyes, her dark cheeks glowing, her soft eyes bright, all dressed in white like a bride, the broad strings of her long white apron tied daintily at her slender waist. Even the kerchief that protected her hair from the smoke of broiling meats was white, bound smoothly across her forehead.

"Dona Magdalena, you are beautiful tonight as a plume of white yucca on the side of the hill," he said.

"Borromeo, San Fernando would be a disconsolate place without you," she said with great gentleness, pleased and similing. "I have a gill of brandy here, and there is coffee for you to put it in. So you see what fine things come when the governor rides down from Monterey to visit us here in the south. Padre Ignacio has been saving this choice berry in his chest for some such notable occasion as this."

"Do you know what the business of this fine governor is in the south?" Borromeo lifted his face presently to inquire.

"He has come to investigate the many false charges that have been dodged against the missions," Magdalena replied.

"I thought Don Geronimo would have the reason of it," Borromeo nodded. "So they have carried their case to the governor? What is it they are crying about, our sheep?"

"The Angelenos say the padres of San Fernando are oppressors because they built a dam in the river years before the pueblo was established. That is one thing. Another cry of oppression rises from the ranchers from Pico and the rest of them around us, but from Pico especially, who says the sheep have destroyed his grazing and he has no place left to pasture his cattle. The others join him in this—you have heard that complaint these two years."

"True, the ranchers have been here many times to see Padre Ignacio about it. What does Don Geronimo think- the governor will do?"

"Don Geronimo is not well enough to be much interested," she replied, sadly.

"But he is mending, Dona?"

"Oh, marvelously. There never was such a physician as Padre Ignacio, although Padre Mateo is a good second, truly a good second."

An Indian lad came for the immense dish of meat, lifted it in both hands and ran out carrying it before him as if he could endure the weight but a little while and soon must place it or let it frop. He was lithe and quick but short and undersized as most of his race, his black coarse hair cut squarely midway of his neck.

"He pretends the dish is hot, playing for an excuse to put it down in the next room and cram his mouth full of meat," Borromeo said.

"There is enough," replied Magdalena, undisturbed.

"You will sit down and take your refreshment now, Doña? Let me tell you, if that governor doesn't decide in our favor after filling his belly with this delicious food from your hands, I'm the man to wait by the side of the road and crack his head with a crow-bar."

"There is no telling what the decision will be. I once heard Don Geronimo say—that time the soldiers were ordered away from the mission—that it was the beginning of the end. Perhaps the governor will give the mission lands away to the greedy ones who are sitting by waiting. It will be a sad day."

"Padre Ignacio will make it clear. It is too bad our little Tula is not at the table with them like a sweet white candle to light their faces."

"It is the last day of her novena for poor Juan," said Magdalena softly. "She is praying constantly."

"Nine days of prayer!" said Borromeo, full of admiration. "There are not many men worthy the great devotion, but Juan is one of the few. If I could transplant one of my eyes to his head, as they say can be done with a crayfish, I'd give it with my blessing."

"I would give him both of mine, and be happy in my blindness," Magdalena said, the tears of gratitude which stood in them enhancing the endowment she would bestow with such unselfish heart.

"Yes, it takes a man to hold his body between another one and the fire. And this is the ninth day since Dominguez brought them home. Nine days of unceasing prayer! It is tremendous!"

"Great blessings call for great sacrifices, untiring devotion, Borromeo."

"Is Tula still determined to carry out the last great act of humility that she has set her heart on so solidly?"

"She is determined."

"And that is to-night?"

"To-night."

"MY PRAYERS will go with her to sustain her in the anguish of her ordeal," said Borromeo, in simple piety. "I thought Padre Ignacio had stopped it. He was against it from the first word."

"He has not consented, neither forbidden

it. Gertrudis will not offend him; she will go about it quietly after the governor has retired and all is still. Padre Ignacio has only to keep out of the way, and you too, my good Borromeo. If her strength is equal to her faith she will cary it through, but she is so pale and worn by her vigils and grief that I am afraid."

"As for me, I do not know. I never heard of such a thing. Maybe our Senora will be pleased by such a sacrifice, but I say I do not know."

"I have heard of it being done," Magdalena said, her voice low and reverent. "It comes from the old times, when there were miracles. Who knows?"

"At least it can do no harm, only to herself," said Borromeo, also reverent and hushed of voice as if he stood in a holy place. "Consider the pain of it, dona. I might undertake it for my own eyes, but for another's——"

"You would if that other one was more to you than eyes, than your whole body—yes, even your life and your very soul."

"In that case there would be nothing left of a man, dona."

"There is nothing left of a woman when she loves a man as Gertrudis does Juan. She can go eagerly to this act of devotion that would make another flinch to think of, and shudder and turn sick."

"Of course Juan does not know of this," he said.

"How should he know, shut up like a bee? No, if he knew anything about it, that would be the end. It would not do."

"Padre Ignacio has kept Juan close," Borromeo admitted. "I wanted to go in to-day to see how he was mending and give him a little cheer, but the padre sent me back. Of course he knows best, but it's a lonesome business for a man to stay there in the dark."

"I shall always remember his blue eyes, and the little smile that used to peep out of them. It is a pity!"

"I laugh when I think of the look in Sergeant Olivera's face when he came here demanding to put a guard over Juan," Borromeo mused. "Padre Ignacio was as firm as a hill. He demanded a proper warrant, signed by the governor himself, and that, of course, Olivera didn't have, any more than Captain del Valle had the day he paid for his sacrilegious defiance."

"It is understood that Olivera sent to Monterey in special haste for such a paper."

"Well, the governor is here now; we shall see. Once I had a friendliness for that lean man Olivera, but if Padre Ignacio would give me permission I would drive him and his soldiers before me like bees the next time they come to San Fernando. Give me a bar of iron five feet long and I will account for any seven soldiers you can stand up against me. Little Cristobal got away from them, smart as they are, anyhow."

"Padre Ignacio says he is far in the desert now, out of the reach of any man," said Magdalena thankfully.

"God speed him, I say, and take him safely to the end of his journey," Borromeo agreed.

"I am reminded." Magdalena rose hurriedly, concern in her face. "I must go to our little Tula and assist her to prepare for the ordeal she is to undertake for the one dearer to her heart than the blood that visits it. Borromeo, I ask you to keep inside your door to-night—this piteous sight is not for the eyes of men."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SACRIFICE OF DEVOTION

NEXT to the trying vats stood the carpenter's house, which was the last one in the row facing on the arcade; beyond the vats was the tallow tank, sunk deep into the ground, its top showing like a sunken turret, as has been said. Then there came a corner of the vineyard which grew up to the church side and spread away to the boundary of the Indian village, where it came against the adobe wall that stood between.

There was more than the whisper of falling grape leaves in the vineyard; more than the low piping of the wind among bare branches, soft as the lute-strings of the night. There was the sound of many feet in soft Indian shoes, and the sound of feet unshod, and the low murmur of voices held in awe, where the people came from the village, old and young, to wait for the passing of the beautiful white lady, and uphold her suffering body on the flood of their sympathetic prayers.

For Don Juan, friend of the oppressed, was blind, and this one was pleading with the Holy Virgin to give him back his sight. She would pass that way to-night, humbly walking on her bare knees from the door of Don Geronimo's house, where she lived, to the altar of the church, hoping to gain through her suffering and humility the favor of Our Blessed Señora.

Four of the little girls who learned their lessons and the use of the needle under her gentle hand were to walk beside her, clothed

all in white, carrying candles to light her agonizing way. There was no secret hiding her deed or its purpose; any person who had the heart to bear her suffering, as the rough tiles cut her tender flesh, was free to come. So they came and waited for her to pass, in reverence, in tender sympathy.

That was to be the crowning of her long petition, the culmination of her sacrifice, for the good Don Juan.

This low-whispering, sympathetic gathering extended along the open part of the arcade where the moonlight fell through its airy, rhythmic arches, reproducing them in sharp outline of shadow on the pavement tiles. Well to the front the young women waited, many of them sitting on the pavement edge, their bright garments like gay blossoms along the way.

These were of the third generation since the Indians embraced the Christian faith. In all essentials except blood they were Spanish and some of them, indeed, were even Spanish in blood, the children of soldiers and other exiles in California who had married Indian wives. Their common language was Spanish; their thoughts were Spanish, molded from infancy by the mission fathers.

Two of these girls sat a little apart, close by the pedestal of an arch, as near to Don Geronimo's door as they could draw, as if some dearer bond of sympathy, some closer understanding, gave them the right to be the first to strew their prayers and sighs and heart-deep wishes like sweet flowers in Gertrudis Sinova's path.

"If I could do as much for poor Cristobal!" sighed one.

"Dona Magdalena says he is safe, far away from San Fernando and the wicked soldiers," her companion said, as if in reminder of something lately discussed.

"But he is not here; he never can return. Gertrudis has Don Juan, even blind, as I would have Cristobal if I could, both blind and deaf. Between having a blind lover and a lover whose hand you never shall touch again—that is the thing, Maria. When I am old, I must sit in the sun beside the wall alone."

"Maybe another one will come in Cristobal's place, perhaps a man from Don Juan's country."

"Why should they come here to be killed, as the soldiers want to kill Don Juan? But if one came, he could go back again; I wouldn't look at him."

"Maybe one from Mexico, then. Who knows?"

"It would not be Cristobal, Maria. No, I am going to wait. When the wicked soldiers are gone from California, as everybody hopes to see them driven out some happy day, Cristobal will come home, if he does not die of a lonely heart in that distant land of strangers."

"There is Padre Mateo, lighting the governor to his room—see—at the window there! Ah, he is closing the shutters; I got only a glimpse of his beard."

"When he goes in the morning to see the mill that Don Juan made you'll get a sight of him, for all the good it will do you. I wouldn't walk the length of the church to see him."

"If you would ask him," Maria spoke eagerly, animated by the sudden thought, "he might give Cristobal a pardon. Who knows?"

"He'd order the soldiers to flog me," Inez replied; bitter beyond her years in the oppression of her sorrow. "There is no pardon for an Indian who lifts his hand against the oppressor of his people. There is Dona Magdalena in her door to see if they are putting out their candles—she is looking at the governor's window. Gertrudis does not want him to see her; she has no faith in his sympathy."

"There, Dona Magdalena goes in and shuts the door. She is a slow woman about some things. How cold the pavement is!" she shuddered, her little brown hand spread on the tiles.

"She is coming!" Inez whispered.

The girls stood, drawing into the shadow with instinctive nicety of regard, to spare Gertrudis the bold evidence, at least, of the curious interest that drew them to the vineyard edge at that late hour.

GERTRUDIS came alone into Don Geronimo's doorway. There were two steps from the threshold to the pavement; on the upper one of these Gertrudis paused, her hand on the door-jamb, one bare foot put out in seeming hesitant exploration, as one advances into untried water whose icy chill is feared.

She was dressed in white, like a bride, with her skirts turned up above her knees as if she lifted them at a brookside. She came with sudden resolution down the steps and stood on the pavement, reassured by the silence around her, although she could see the Indians grouped along the arcade at the margin of the vineyard. There was something in their attitude of silent, sympathetic waiting that was like a sustaining hand.

Don Geronimo's house stood almost in the center of the arcade, there being something less than a hundred yards between his steps and the great door of the church. Ahead of Gertrudis the shadowy arcade stretched away, broken by loops of moonlight; on one hand was the cart-track, white with dust; on the other, a little way ahead, the vineyard. In the courtyard behind her the water of the fountain could be heard plashing as it overflowed the rim of its great mossy bowl, which stood like a goblet among water hyacinths and lilies.

The little candle-bearers appeared suddenly in the door, released with their blazing tapers from the room where Dona Magdalena had held them in readiness. Gertrudis dropped to her knees; the little girls ranged beside her, two a pace or two ahead, two a like distance behind. They were dressed in white; their feet were bare. White ribbons were bound around their foreheads and smooth black hair.

Gertrudis remained as she had knelt a little while, her head bowed. Along the edge of the vineyard her humble friends were strewing the rose-leaves of their ardent prayers in the way her knees, bared to this act of devotional appeal, must pass.

A little sigh sounded, a faint, soft gasp, from the breasts of those dark, grave watchers when Gertrudis lifted her face, her head thrown back a little as if she looked into heaven, and began her painful march. Her fair hair was drawn back smoothly, every joyous ripple of it pressed down and bound by the white ribbon that circled her forehead. It was a broad ribbon, worn after the fashion of the Indian girls on fiesta days. In the center of it, just between Gertrudis's eyes, there was a silver star.

Dona Magdalena closed her door without a sound. She came and stood in the center of the arcade like a sentinel, seeming to say that none was to follow the slow little procession, no matter how hard sympathy might urge. Gertrudis passed on, clasped hands pressed to her breast in attitude of appeal, her face white and holy, lifted as if to keep her eyes from the calculation of what distance lay between her and the end of that painful journey.

"She sees nothing of this earth!" Inez whispered as she passed.

"She does not shrink, she puts her dear soft knees down as if they fell on cushions. But look! Every step—oh, every step!"

The tiles of the pavement were worn down by the stream of feet that ran over them unceasingly. But there were set into them little bits of granite, sharp-angled and enduring; pebbles of harder substance than the red-baked soil. These stood above the worn surfaces, as if they had been sown by the hands of a torturer, to tear this suppliant's tender flesh. With each step the candles of the two little girls who came behind her revealed dark spots on the chafed red tiles.

They were kneeling along the edge of the vineyard as Gertrudis passed, except here and there one whose curiosity was stronger than his piety, who stood among the vines. The murmur of low-breathed prayers rose softly; at least half the village was there, moved to compassion by this spectacle of sacrifice.

Gertrudis wavered only once in this tortuous march. She had passed more than half the distance when it seemed that the agony of her bleeding knees was more than she could bear. She stopped, swaying as if to fall. The two girls who walked ahead of her continued on, unaware of the break in the suppliant's slow march. Wrung by an agony that could not remain voiceless, Gertrudis bowed her head and cried, a sharp sob breaking the struggling compression of her brave lips, pressed hard to hold it back.

There was such anguish in the cry, such piteous appeal, that it seemed to echo from the hearts of those who heard it. The sound of this sympathetic weeping, bursting here and there into an uncontrollable sharp wail, frightened the candle-bearers until it seemed for a moment that they would run away, screaming the terror that stared out of their wild little eyes. Gertrudis spoke softly to them, her own suffering submerged in the presence of their fear. The two leaders came back; the little procession moved on.

Dona Magdalena had arranged Gertudis's dress in a way that it modestly covered her bare limbs when she knelt, and all but trailed over her feet. There were splashes of blood-stains on the white cloth now; on the tiles the dark spots grew broader, with a trail of trickling drops between. Gertrudis pressed on resolutely, her face lifted again in the rapt fixity of her appeal. Those who had the heart to look at her as she passed the church corner and drew near the door, said it was beautifully serene. For in the measure of her suffering, founded on the profundity of her faith, she expected to be rewarded at her journey's end.

"The little ones are to stop at the door," said Maria. "The altar lights will guide her the rest of the way."

"They are turning back; it is done," Inez whispered.

The two girls rose from their knees. The four little candle-bearers came running, the

flames of their tapers streaming, flying from the church door as they might have fled from a tomb. Dona Magdalena advanced and spoke gently to the people who loved her for her merciful intercessions in the past.

"She is in the care of Our Blessed Senora," Dona Magdalena said. "Go home now, good children, and leave her to her prayers."

They went away through the moonlit vineyard, drawing together in little groups of families and friends to talk in low voice of the courageous sweet lady who had walked in the pangs of her own blood to carry her appeal for poor Don Juan to the very gates of heaven.

"If anybody thinks it is not such a great thing to do," said an earnest old man whose face was wrinkled like a dried fig, "let him press his bare elbow with the weight of his body here." He scuffed his sandaled foot on the hard ground, rough with particles of disintegrated granite from the crumbling ledges of the hills.

Dona Magdalena stood a moment at her door, looking toward the church; then she went in, closing the door upon that sorrowful way from which even the moonlight was withdrawing, as if in pity for the dark stains upon the rugged tiles.

In the church Gertrudis lay prostrate before the altar, where she had sunk down when pain dispersed her turmoiled senses. Faith and courage had sustained her to the last step of that dolorous journey. She lay like a white dove brought down by an arrow, her arms reached out in pathetic supplication, her fair hair against the knee-worn tiles. Her white dress glimmered in the pale altar lights, the dark blotches soothed down to shadows that could not offend the eye. Her simple sacrifice was done; the utmost exertion of her devoted heart was expended.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ANGELENOS

PADRE IGNACIO was up later than usual that night. He had been sitting long at table with the governor; the gentle padre's candle-beam was bright in his north window long after Gertrudis finished her painful walk. Even after he had closed the record book, where all the doings of the mission were set down for the president's eye, he sat involved in a web of speculations that kept the desire of sleep from his eyes.

In the chamber adjoining, Governor Jose Joaquin de Arrillaga lay asleep. It was the first time in his six years as Governor of California that he had visited the south. Now he had come on the persistent complaint of the people of the Pueblo de Los Angeles and ranchers of consequence whose lands bordered those of the Mission San Fernando, to hear at first hand the pleas and defense.

Governor de Arrillaga was a friend of the missions; he understood fully their importance, the vast spiritual and industrial labors which they sustained to the glory of God and the welfare of man. Padre Ignacio was fully aware of this. Yet the priest was not animated by any great hope that the outcome of this controversy between the mission and the people, whom he looked upon as interlopers, would be decided as he would have wished. The governor was a diplomatic man, genial, friendly, but so guarded of word that his mind seemed fallow ground, in which the seed of testimony must be sown and brought to fullness before he would deliver his opinion.

Well enough, quite within the practice of justice, Padre Ignacio admitted. Yet the cause of the missions was so evident that no man could deny the justice of it, except those politicians and schemers whose hands burned to lay hold of these vast enterprises and divide their treasures among themselves.

Not only the treasures of hemp-lands, and wheat-lands, orchards, vineyards, fair gardens, cattle and sheep numbered by the hundreds of thousands on the ranges of the missions between San Diego and Monterey; not only these, but the poor simple wards of the padres, the Indians redeemed by the faithful labors and marvelous patience, zeal and tender love of these men whose reward was not among the things of earth. These defenseless creatures, only a step removed from the most barbarous state that man ever descended into, the greedy rascals who pressed closer day by day would tear away from the mission shelter and enslave.

The quietude of the night soothed him; the desire of sleep descended on him heavily. He drew the candle forward, leaning to puff the flame. There was no thought in his mind of Gertrudis and the sacrifice she had proposed to make in the simplicity of her deep faith; the sorrowful act of devotion had been carried through so quietly that no murmur of those who witnessed it had reached to his open window, and he had been so deeply occupied with the business which crowded his mind that he had not looked out upon the arcade, or the white-gleaming church at its farther end until this moment.

"It is almost as light without as within," he said, his hand held for a moment between

the candle and his eyes. "It is the hour of peace."

Padre Ignacio blew out his candle. The moon was looking in at his eastern window, the bars across its face in curious effect. Padre Ignacio sat looking at it in a calm reverie.

"Padre Ignacio! Padre Ignacio!"

The voice was beneath his north window, where the gleam of his candle had shone but a moment before. Sharp, clear, insistent in its clamor, its emphasis of alarm. Padre Ignacio sprang to his feet, to the window.

"Who calls?" he demanded, straining to see directly below him, whence the voice sounded.

"Padre Ignacio! The Angelenos—they are breaking down the dam!"

"Who calls?" Padre Ignacio demanded again, bristling with a cold thrill at the wild note of that shrill voice.

"The Angelenos—they are placing a blast of powder in the dam!"

Padre Ignacio heard the swift scuttle of soft-shod feet across the pavement of the court as the messenger who had shouted this disturbing news into his peaceful window ran in the direction of the blacksmith shop. The thickness of the wall at his window sill, the bars outside it, prevented Padre Ignacio seeing who this person was. The earnestness of the shouted warning, the tremulous eagerness of its wild note, seemed to echo yet in the great empty room. Padre Mateo was aroused; he was making a noise at his window.

"Who is bellowing there?" Padre Ignacio heard him demand, the huskiness of sleep in his throat.

"I will hasten to the dam," Padre Ignacio said, putting his head a moment in at Padre Mateo's door as he passed.

"I will be at your heels," Padre Mateo returned, his head already in his gown.

Padre Ignacio did not wait. He ran toward the church, bristling with outraged indignation against this sneaking trespass by the Angelenos, not doubting for a breath that the warning had been an honest one. The high, tremulous, anxious voice still sounded in his ears like the pain of a thorn in the hand.

"I seemed to know that voice," he muttered as he ran, his long legs cutting the distance like a swallow's wings." I seemed to know it, but it evades me like an echo."

He hurried on, flitting from arch to arch like a swift bird. He cut through the corner of the vineyard to the vestry door outside which Captain del Valle had fallen. In a moment he was out again, carrying with him the tall black cross borne at the head of processions. It was more than half as high as Padre Ignacio. A figure of Our Senor was carved upon its tree.

Governor de Arrillaga's sleep had been cut by the alarm beneath Padre Ignacio's window; his waking had been as sudden as a fall. Now he was moving about in his chamber.

"What is this?" he called, his head thrust out of his door." What alarm is this under my window, Padre Ignacio?"

"There is an assault on the dam by those rascals of the pueblo," Padre Mateo informed him, coming to his door a little way along the dark passage under the bare rafters. "Padre Ignacio has gone to stop them—I am going. Compose yourself until we return."

"Stay!" the governor commanded. "Guide me to the dam. In a moment I'll be with you—in a moment. Where the devil is my sword!"

Padre Mateo, boiling as he was with rage against the skulking rascals who had come to work them this incalculable damage, had no choice but to curb his passion and his feet. He heard the governor let his sword fall with a loud clatter on the tiles, and the muttered curses of the great man as he snatched the various pieces of his apparel. Padre Mateo made ready his candle to light the governor down the stairs.

For an elderly stout man, Governor de Arrillaga was quick about getting into his clothes. Although it seemed long to Padre Mateo's fuming impatience, it could not have been more than a minute or two until the governor appeared in his boots, his trousers pulled on with rather a stuffy appearance over his nightgown. He was carrying his sword in his hand.

"Now, my good Padre, I'm with you," he said. "Lead away—let me get a sight of these precious citizens at their admirable work!"

FEARFUL for his precious dam, Padre Ignacio arrived in breathless precipitation having run all the way. He burst among the wreckers, who were so intent on their preliminary work of destruction that they had not seen him until he was within two rods of them. Before him he held the cross with extended arms like a peace offering or a shield.

"Hold your work here, lawless men!" Padre Ignacio commanded. He pushed among them to the spot where two men under the direction of no less important person than Comisionado Felix himself, were

drilling a hole with a crowbar deep into the adobe-and-boulder dam.

There were not more than nine or ten men in the crowd; their horses were tied near the mill. The moon was so bright that the features of every man there were laid plainly before Padre Ignacio's searching eyes, and he was not in the least surprised to see the other two members of the committee who had waited on him not long past in company with the comissionado: Sebastian Alvitre, late outlaw of the king's road, now inn-keeper at the pueblo; and Manuel Roja, citizen of no particular calling. The others were unknown to Padre Ignacio, but he made such note of their faces as to be able to identify every one of them when necessary.

The men who were drilling the hole dropped the bar and drew away from the cross as from a firebrand, one of them stumbling blindly against the pail of water they had been pouring into the hole to soften the sun-dried bricks, upsetting it over Sebastian Alvitre's feet. Padre Ignacio saw that several holes had been started and abandoned, due to striking imbedded boulders. This one they had down four feet or more, already below the water line. The priest planted the cross in the mouth of this hole, pushing it down solidly, leaving it standing there in its sacred defiance.

"So, I see you here, Vincente Felix," he said sternly, "a man sworn to uphold and enforce the law, setting your hand to this outrageous deed! Sebastian Alvitre, this is the manner in which you repay the mercy of those whose generosity saved your neck from the hangman's rope."

Alvitre had not moved an inch at Padre Ignacio's approach. He stood within arm's reach of the cross, the shadow of his broad hat across his dark face.

"We have not come on a lawless expedition," Comisionado Felix denied.

He came forward, standing to face Alvitre, Padre Ignacio and his cross between. The others had fallen back, leaving a broad clear space around the point of their interrupted operations.

"There, Padre Ignacio, there is our reason for coming," said Alvitre, pointing to the spillway. "See that little trickle of water that you spare us from the plenty you have stored up behind this dam. That is our reason for coming here to-night, after our prayers and petitions to you have failed."

"It wastes away before it comes to the pueblo; our gardens have withered; our cattle are dying; our women and children are suffering the pangs of thirst," Comisionado Felix declared. He set himself in dramatic attitude, arms thrown out as if he laid his purpose and its motives bare to all the earth.

"You have come like cowards and dishonest men to take what does not belong to you," Padre Ignacio replied.

"You wrong us, good Padre," Alvitre boldly defended. "We have come only to take what is our right. Your oppressions cry out to God!"

"Miserable man! Away with you, now—all of you! Begone from here! If any man puts hand to the destruction of this work again, he——"

"I have heard curses, and I have been cursed, Padre; they don't hurt a man," Alvitre interrupted. "But I will tell you, Padre Ignacio, we are reasonable men. If you value your water so dearly, maybe you are ready to pay us the damages we have suffered, and keep it where it is. The soldiers have not eaten up all of your gold."

"You discover the honesty of your purpose here, Alvitre," Padre Ignacio returned, contemptuous of this offer to compromise for a price.

"And there is a horse at this mission belonging to me," Alvitre pursued, unshaken, unasbahed, bold as he ever was when he took away a man's money on the king's road. "I must include the horse in my terms of settlement. Bring us two thousand dollars in gold, good Padre, and my horse, and you will see us ride away from here. With that money we can put down wells; we can endure till the rains come."

The others, some of whom were drawing off at the priest's half-spoken threat of the church's awful displeasure, Manuel Roja, the fat citizen among them, came crowding near again when Alvitre began this proposal of compromise. Comisionado Felix, little better than his second, caught at this offered adjustment with hungry zeal.

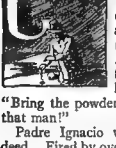
"Indemnity, that is all we ask, or, it might be said with more truth, aid in finding water somewhere in the ground that we can't find in the river any longer, since the padres at San Fernando shut it up to their own selfish use," Felix said.

"It is plain that your purpose is robbery, if not of one thing, then another," Padre Ignacio replied, more sad than indignant to see such rascality stripped of all pretense. "Poor knaves! You do not understand the enormity of the thing you propose. But you shall take neither water nor gold from San Fernando to-night. It is enough. Go now —away with you!"

"Roja, do you desert us?" Alvitre demanded, roughly challenging the citizen who

was starting again toward his horse, followed by three or four.

"I have misunderstood your purpose, and I did not come to fight a priest," Roja replied.



"O YOUR way, coward! There are enough without you. I am not afraid of a piece of wood, nor any man's curse!" Alvitre snatched the cross flung it aside, and set his foot over the hole. "Bring the powder and fuse! Felix, watch that man!"

Padre Ignacio would bear watching indeed. Fired by overmastering resentment of this ruffian's contempt of the church's authority, he sprang and picked up the cross. He swung it with all the passion of his heart, all the strength of his sinewy arms, and would have struck Alvitre down in a moment only for the interference of a tall bearded man who leaped and caught his arm from behind. The rascal laughed lightly, as if he had overpowered a defiant boy, twisted the cross out of Padre Ignacio's hands and stood holding him by the wrists.

"Take yourself away from here in peace, Padre, before I tie you with your girdle to yonder post and leave you to enjoy the spectable of the blast that's going to blow your dam to pieces in a minute or two," Alvitre counselled.

"You shall blow me to pieces with it, then! I'll not move a foot!"

Alvitre lifted his head from the work of pouring powder into the hole. He looked at Padre Ignacio a moment, his hat pushed back, the moonlight on his face. There was a gleam of his teeth between his parted lips.

"You poor old fool! I believe you'd do it!" he said. "Take him over behind the mill—see to it, Felix—where he'll be out of harm, and tie him securely. It will do him good to hear the water rush."

"Come away, Padre, come away," Comisionado Felix requested, his voice in a degree respectful, his hand lightly on the priest's shoulder. "We must have our water, you understand. You can see the river is dry, so dry, I tell you good padre, that it is no more than a mule can drink three miles below this dam."

Alvitre had stepped into command of the expedition as naturally as if he had been appointed captain of it instead of Comisionado Felix. Whatever justice there might be behind their complaint of oppression in this matter of shutting off the river, their act was an unlawful one, outrageous as it was cowardly. All these phases of it fitted it peculiarly to Alvitre's hand. He put down the bag of powder with a curse when he saw that Padre Ignacio moved neither at his command nor the Comisionado's entreaty.

"We're not going to have a martyr here, old man," he said rudely. "Now, march away before you set me on fire with a passion that jumps up in me quicker and hotter against a priest than any other man. You're not different from other people, you priests; you've got legs under that long gown. Let me see you march on them this moment!"

"Here is somebody coming!" said the man who held Padre Ignacio's arms.

"Nothing but another gown, and that serpent Geronimo Lozano," Alvitre said, contemptuous of their coming. "I'll make a martyr of him, with very great pleasure."

Padre Mateo and the governor were approaching along the dam from the direction of the mill, which stood not more than twenty or thirty yards away. Roja and those who were leaving with him, paused in the shadow of the mill to hear, perhaps, whether some new negotiations would begin, in the result of which they might return and share. Alvitre, indifferent to the arrival of this pair, was tamping down the blast with the smaller end of the bar.

Governor de Arrillaga came ahead, puffing from his run. He laid sudden hand on the man who was holding Padre Ignacio, and flung him aside, sending him sprawling down the bank.

"What do I behold?" he roared. "Citizens of the pueblo in this most despicable design!"

"Comisionado Felix, guardian of the law in the Pueblo de Los Angeles," said Padre Mateo, "and on your other hand, Governor de Arrillaga, one Sebastian Alvitre, who places the powder to wreck our dam. Excellent gentlemen, both!"

Comisionado Felix was speechless before the governor, turning his head in anxious calculation first toward his horse, then toward the chief executive at whose mercy he stood. What was passing in his mind was not worth the trouble of stopping to read, for it could have been only subterfuge and plans of excuse and evasion, or perhaps of treachery to those whom he had involved.

Sebastian Alvitre was more collected, for he had been confronted in his villainy many times in his life. He leaned on the bar, his eyes drawn to a scowling point.

"So, it is the governor, heh?" he said.

"Comisionado Felix, I will have my hour with you," the governor said, dismissing him with that.

Felix started away, slinking and afraid. The man who had held Padre Ignacio, who was, in fact, nothing more than one of Alvitre's former companions of the road, had scrambled up the bank again. Two others and Alvitre, of the raiders, remained.

"YOU are Sebastian Alvitre, then?" said the governor, advancing a step, leaning to look sharply at the fellow, "whom I pardoned at the petition of Captain del Valle, on his assurance that you were an honest man at the bottom, and one who had rendered service to the state."

"It is I," Alvitre returned, insolent under the governor's severity where an honest man would have been ashamed.

"Your pardon is revoked. Stand! You are under arrest." The governor's sword flashed in the moonlight as he spoke. He presented it at Alvitre's breast. "And I tell you, villain, that you shall hang for this night's work!"

"I'll have something to hang for, then!" Alvitre cried.

He sprang back, snatched a pistol from his sash, the governor's sword-point pressing him. The cap flashed in the governor's face; Alvitre flung the pistol down with a curse, retreating nimbly before the governor's sword.

"Stand!" the governor commanded. "Stand, or you're a dead man!"

Alvitre's foot struck the cross that he had contemptuously wrenched from the place where Padre Ignacio had planted it. He bent as swift as a swallow, laid hold of it, guarding himself against Governor de Arrillaga's lunges with desperate dexterity. A smashing blow sent the sword whirling down the embankment; Alvitre, a cry of rage in his throat, lifted the cross high to strike the governor dead.

A swishing sound, as of the wing of a waterfowl rushing in the panic of flight above the hunter's head; a noise of impact, sudden, sharp, as an apple falling from the bough at night. Sebastian Alvitre caught his breath with a choking sharp gasp, flung out his hands and fell upon his face, the cross beneath his body.

"The Indians!"

The man who had held Padre Ignacio in his insolent strength gave this alarm, plunging down the embankment of the dam as he spoke. His companions followed, while the two priests and the governor bent over the fallen man, the raiders mounted and rode hard toward the hills.

"An arrow!" Padre Ignacio muttered.

"It was heaven-sent, it saved my life!" the governor said.

Padre Mateo was looking toward the willows which fringed the margin of the lake.

"There are two men yonder!" Governor de Arrillaga said, pointing.

"Advance!" Padre Mateo cried, his voice trembling with emotion indescribable, a quick, strange gladness that thrilled him to the marrow.

The two men were only a few yards distant; Padre Ignacio ran a little way to meet them, stopped, his hands lifted in astonishment.

"Juan Molinero! Cristobal! Juan!" he said, amazement making his utterance weak.

Juan leaped forward like a man from his prison door, to fall on his knees at Padre Ignacio's feet. The wondering priest laid his hands in benediction on the young man's head, lifted him gently, saying nothing; turned his face to the moonlight and looked anxiously into his eyes.

"You see!" he said.

"Thank God for his mercy!" Juan returned

"It is a miracle!" Padre Mateo declared.

"It seems no less," said Juan, his voice hushed in the great flood of his thankfulness.

"When did this come to you, Juan? When were you restored?" Padre Ignacio inquired.

"I heard Cristobal give the alarm——"

"Ah, Cristobal; it was Cristobal. I knew, and yet I did not know. And then?"

"I sprang from my bed, Padre Ignacio, forgetting for the moment that I was blind. You know it is the way of a man who has depended on his eyes to tell him things, to think of seeing first. I was alarmed by the thought of the dam, standing there in the dark. Cristobal called you again! I rushed toward the window; I tore the bandage from my eyes, and I could see!"

"It is a miracle!" Padre Mateo whispered. "Juan Molinero, thank God for the devotion of a pure heart whose pleading and suffering brings back to you this inestimable treasure."

"Gertrudis! What has she done? Where is she? What—what——"

"Patience, patience, my son," Padre Ignacio calmed him, hand on his shoulder to stop him as he stood ready to bound away to seek her.

"She is safe," Padre Mateo said.

"Where is she?" Juan demanded, his voice and manner so stern that Padre Mateo drew back a little as if in fear.

"Before the altar. I saw her there as I passed the church door but a little while ago. Calm yourself——"

Juan did not wait to hear the pacific words, He leaped past them like a fugitive who fled for life; they could see him running swiftly along the white cart-track that led past the great church door.

Chapter XXIII

A ROCK IN THE DEEP

GERTRUDIS revived from the swoon of her suffering, chilled by the cold tiles of the floor. There was a struggle in her consciousness for a little while against the confusion of what seemed a departing dream, followed by a clearing, revealing with sudden rememberance all that had passed. Juan—she had perfected her appeal to heaven for Juan.

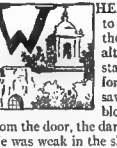
She thought of him with a welling tenderness which mounted in a sweep to an intensity that was almost a pain. Where was Juan? Not there. What if her poor sacrifice for him had failed! It was a terrifying thought. She would stand rebuked for her unworthiness; some offering more precious than her devotion, her prayers, the pain of her body and its blood, would be required, and she had no more to give.

There was no pain in her torn, bruised knees; but a numbness and a cold throbbing, a heaviness as of stone when she tried to lift herself and pray. She sank down again prostrate, her cheek to the rough tiles, hollowed there before the altar by the feet of so many burdened ones who had come to kneel and pray. She stretched there, her arms reaching out in piteous appeal, too weak, too spent, too crushed and bruised and sorrowful in the shadow of the dark belief that she had failed, to murmur one more little prayer to cap the golden sheaves of the supplications she had sent before.

It was certain now that she had failed, or Juan would have come.

How long had she lain there? What was the hour? She was so weary, spent and cold! Tears that came on her cheeks were cold tears; warmth had gone out of the world with hope and faith. How could she struggle to her feet and go to Dona Magdalena's house, and to her bed under the window where the sun came in at morning? How could she ever return to face them all: Padre Ignacio—who had not shared her confidence in the sufficiency of this ordeal—Dona Magdalena, and poor Juan. Juan would have come if this had availed. Juan would have come.

She lay as nerveless as one dead, and sank, and sank, under the pressure of what she resented with her last gleam of thought as a dream.



WHEN Juan Molinero came to her there prostrate in the dim lights of the altar, he did not understand what this sacrifice for him had been. He saw the pitiful trail of blood across the tiles from the door, the dark stain on her bare feet. He was weak in the shaking of a terrible fear as he fell to his knees beside her, and touched her cheek in the agony of his life's greatest dread.

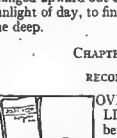
"Tula! Tula!" he pleaded, bending over her, his voice in her ear.

So it was she broke the trammeling meshes of the dream that was not a dream.

She felt him lift her, and was serene as if an angel had stooped out of heaven to bear her to paradise. Juan stood holding her in his arms, the light of the altar candles on his face. She lifted her hand weakly, like the flutter of a wounded bird that struggles to take wing. He took her hand and guided it, understanding her desire. She touched his eyelids, and stroked his face with her numb cold fingers, wonder growing in her eyes. She smiled, and sighed, and drew close to him, this renascence of faith and thankfulness giving strength to her arms to clasp them about this neck, and cling as if she had plunged upward out of the waters to the glad sunlight of day, to find a rock in the midst of the deep.

Chapter XXIV

RECOMPENSE



GOVERNOR DE ARRILLAGA had faced death before in his day, yet he never had been so shaken by the confrontation as to-night. This adventure had its aspect of commonness; there was no dignity in it. To be slain by a vile bandit with an outraged cross was no fitting end for a governor. It would have been said of him that he fell in a brawl, little more dignified, if not quite as ignoble, as a riot of dirty fellows in the street. It was enough to cause a man to walk in the silence of reflection, turning over in his mind the sombre thoughts that attended this happy deliverance.

Juan was standing under the arcade before

Don Geronimo's door, whither he had been banished by Dona Magdalena, who had only to whisper a word, indeed, in explanation of the delicate matter of Gertrudis's wounds, to send him flying into the night. Dona Magdalena had stood before him in awe, afraid to touch him, even to let her garment brush him.

For Gertrudis, agent of this miraculous restoration as Dona Magdalena declared it to be, the good woman had a reverent regard. There was the balm of healing in the very compassion of her touch. She assured Juan that Gertrudis would be well in the morning, to which confident declaration Gertrudis added the hopeful assurance of her smile. It was a wan, a weak, a weary smile, yet the placid expression of serenity, of humble gratitude. There was no triumph in it, no exultation in a reward struggled for and won.

Padre Mateo was almost equal to Dona Magdalena in his regard for Juan. When he came up with Cristobal, leading Padre Ignacio and the governor by almost a quarter of a mile, Padre Mateo spoke to Juan in whispers. He inquired of Gertrudis, expressing thanks for the promise of her quick recovery. He suggested that they turn back to meet the governor, who had sent word ahead that he desired to inquire into the part borne by Juan and Cristobal in the late tragedy.

"It will please him to have some deference shown," he said. "I hastened on to acquaint you with his desire, Juan, but it will be better if we go and meet him. He is a just man, but he is a governor."

They met Padre Ignacio and the governor before the church. There, in the moonlight that fell white on the bare, hard-trampled ground in front of the door, Governor de Arrillaga stopped to hold his court of inquiry into the adventure of the night. His short, harsh hair was standing on end from the raking of his perplexed fingers during his silent walk at Padre Ignacio's side; his sash was slipped out of place around his rather well-filled body, his wide-topped boots flapped about his legs. The collar of his nightgown was open, his sword-belt hastily buckled, the end of it loose from the guard.

Yet the governor was a man of commanding figure and presence in spite of his disarray. He had sat in high offices for many years; his position in California was virtually that of a king.

"Governor de Arrillaga, this is Juan Molinero, of whom you have heard to-night in our conversation before this disturbing hour," Padre Ignacio said, presenting Juan as formally as if the governor had not seen him at the dam a few minutes past.

"The one who was blind?" said the governor.

"Who now sees through a miracle——"

"And this is Cristobal," Padre Ignacio broke his coadjutor's fervent declaration, his hand on the young Indian's shoulder. "You have heard of him to-night, also."

"So it is," said the governor; "it is very true. Now tell me," he demanded with sudden directness, looking from one to the other of the two young men, "whose arrow was it that struck that villain down?"

Juan stepped forward. He was not an assuring figure, his appearance more in keeping with those who had come in violence than one who had intervened as a friend. The scars of his face were hidden by his thick-growing beard; his hair was in disorder on his forehead; he was dressed in the rough garb that he lately had worn in the shops and mill.

"Is this act to be regarded as a service to be commended, Governor de Arrillaga, or a crime to be condemned?" Juan asked.

"The arrow saved my life," the governor returned, his voice calm, his manner unmoved. "Does a man condemn such a service? Juan Molinero, I would reward the man whose hand despatched that arrow in the measure of his service to me, if it lay within my power. Let him speak without fear."

"It was Cristobal, Excellency."

"Excellency, it was Juan."

The two men spoke together, as if they had rehearsed the declaration many times, so readily do the words of generous abnegation spring from the lips of friends. Each of them stepped forward a little, as if in haste to lodge his information first in the governor's ears, hands put out in earnest appeal for credence of statements so impossibly at variance.

"What is this?" the governor demanded, looking curiously from one to the other.

"It will be easy to prove that it is Cristobal's arrow—his mark is on it," said Juan.

"My arrow, but Juan aimed it," Cristobal testified with equal earnestness. "Excellency, give him his life; your soldiers hunt him like a panther. You see now what a man he is!"

"I beg this reward for Cristobal, whose true arrow never fails a friend," Juan entreated. "His life is forfeit for the death of Captain del Valle. Give it to him, I beg you, Excellency, in payment for your own."

"I see how it is between you," the governor said, lifting his hand for silence when Padre Mateo would have spoken. "Each would have the reward go to the other one, with the

true generosity of a friend. But suppose that I say, with this conflicting testimony before me, that it was neither Cristobal nor Juan who shot the arrow that saved my life?"

"Our horses stand waiting, Excellency; we will ride on our way," said Juan.

The governor took a little turn up and down the open space, fingers raking his upstanding hair, a man in deep perplexity, it was plain. Yet it was as evident, also, that he desired to resolve this matter in a just and equitable way.

"It is strange," he said, muttering as to himself, "that one who was blind, and another who was far distant, should meet in the moment of my peril and do me a service which neither will own. A man would think it disgraceful to save a mere governor's life, the way you fellows put it off on each other. I don't know whether either one of you is deserving; I don't know whether to believe you or not. Still, somebody shot Alvitre; he is lying dead on the dam."

Governor de Arrillaga looked from Juan to Cristobal, from Padre Mateo to Padre Ignacio, hand in his short harsh hair.

"It is unfortunate that I do not know anything about the integrity of either witness," he said, "or what credence to place in the word of either Cristobal or Juan. Never mind, Padre Ignacio; I know what is in your generous heart. You cannot see wrong in any of your children. Permit me to sound this matter in my own way."

Padre Ignacio spread his hands in gesture of resignation. He whispered to Padre Mateo; they stood waiting the governor's decision while he paced back and forth again across the trampled dooryard of the church.

"WHEN I shall interpret this mystery this way," the governor said, stopping abruptly before the two young men." I shall say that both Juan and Cristobal shot the arrow that saved my life, and both Juan and Cristobal shall be rewarded as they individually deserve.

"Juan Molinero, your case has been laid before me to-night by your good padres; we have discussed it fully. I cannot see that you are guilty of any crime. The old decree that sets the penalty of death upon foreigners who enter Alta California is oppressive and unjust; it cannot stand between friendly nations. Aside from your service to me this night you have shown yourself a courageous, a worthy and generous man. Your work here at San Fernando, also, has been of incalculable value, not alone to the mission, but to the public. You are free from all charges and harrassments from this moment. You may remain in California, with all the privileges of a citizen, or depart to your own country, as you desire. So much, then, for you."

"I thank your Excellency," said Juan, standing so very straight that it seemed his back never had owned a superior by bending before any man.

"Cristobal, your case is more serious," the governor continued. "You are charged with killing the king's officer, Captain del Valle, of the military forces of Alta California. What is there you can say?"

"Only that I am happy I did not wound him, Excellency."

"And why did you return to San Fernando, when you were thought to be far away?"

"I was far away, but my heart was here. I could not go on without knowing what had become of my friend."

"Permit me, Governor de Arrillaga," Padre Mateo requested, not to be silenced any longer. "Many things have come to our ears concerning Captain del Valle since the day he fell, not least among them absolute proof that he was an ally of Sebastian Alvitre and shared his plunders of the road. This is conclusive."

"Complaints of the same tenor have reached me," the governor admitted. "You hasten me to my conclusion, Padre Mateo —what is it I would have said? No matter; the man was unworthy, he was an oppressor in his place. Yet that does not justify you, Cristobal, in your awful deed. A man cannot be convicted without testimony, however, and I am told there were not witnesses to your crime, no eye that saw you direct the arrow against the king's soldier.

"A man cannot be compelled to testify against himself; I cannot accept your unsupported declaration that you are guilty of this crime. Therefore, you are absolved, you are fully pardoned, you are set free. Except—except such penance as Padre Ignacio shall set for you, which is a thing I leave to him."

Here the governor, as if overwhelmed by his growing gratitude, the warmth of his nature melting the least clinging hardness of his words, rushed to Cristobal and embraced him. From Cristobal he dashed to Juan, enfolding him in his arms, drawing the young man's hairy face against his own.

"I had no son until this night; now God has given me two!" he said.

SILENTLY Padre Ignacio and his coadjutor sat on the bench beside the broad door that opened to the winepress and the cellar. The moon had turned the middle of the world, and was filling the courtyard with a light that was like soft music of harps and viols, falling even against the north wall of the white mission, touching the knees of the two priests where they sat. Governor de Arrillaga had gone to his bed; Cristobal to the village. Juan was pacing like a sentry up and down the arcade before Don Geronimo's door.

"It was a marvel, but not a miracle, Brother Mateo," the elder priest said, as if approaching a conclusion of the discussion that had run between them for an hour or more.

"It is an elusive distinction, for me at least," Padre Mateo returned, shaking his head with the stubbornness of a man unconvinced.

"As I have told you," Padre Ignacio said kindly, patiently, "Juan was not blind, at least according to my belief from the first. His eyes were sensitive to light; I had intended to begin in a little while to introduce him gradually to the day, not certain, but hopeful, that he might see very well again in time. This recovery is beyond my expectation, far beyond, indeed."

"Then it remains a miracle, for all your logic, Padre Ignacio."

"Not so, Brother Mateo; there is no necessity for miracles since our faith is established among all men. Juan leaped up at Cristobal's cry, shocked by the alarm in the peaceful night. All the force within him desired to see; every nerve bent its energy to the consummation of that desire. So, in a moment, his bodily forces accomplished what might have taken months in the ordinary course of healing. The clouds cleared from his eyes, in the same manner that the stress of great excitement, the shock of a sudden sorrow, has been known to strike men blind. It all resolves in a natural and explicable way."

Padre Mateo was silent a little while, yet the course of his thoughts could be traced by the slow, stubborn shaking of his head from time to time.

"Then Gertrudis must be told that all she suffered in anguish of spirit and body, all her pitiful petitioning through the long, sad hours, has been thrown away. It availed nothing; it was an empty sacrifice."

"Such devotion is not thrown away; it is not lost in heaven or earth," Padre Ignacio replied with infinite gentleness.

"You are a physician, and I am not," Padre Mateo said. "You have an understanding of the science of optics, of which I am ignorant. But, my dear Padre Ignacio, science and logic, optics and physics and all aside, it is a miracle to them."

He stretched out his hand toward Don Geronimo's house, where Juan was pacing his tireless beat before the door.

"He cannot sleep, exalted as he is by the compassion that has melted his very heart. How is truth best served? By ruthless unveiling, or by tender reservations?"

"Poor child!" Padre Ignacio murmured. "She has emptied the chalice of her heart for him. And the blessing of it is, he is worthy."

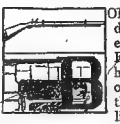
"Then who is to tell her," Padre Mateo asked, turning earnestly to his superior, "that she won nothing, that Cristobal's shout beneath the window did it all? No, Padre Ignacio, it is still a miracle to me; let it remain a miracle to them."

Padre Ignacio did not reply at once. He sat reclined wearily, his white-fringed head against the plaster wall, his sandaled feet stretched out as if he slept. Presently he raised himself quickly, put his hand on Padre Mateo's where it lay on the bench beside him, in his caressing, assuring, comforting way.

"Yes, it is better so," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

SUNSET AND EVENING BELLS



BORROMEO stood in his door, looking over the evening peace of San Fernando. Gertrudis had dismissed her class of girls, who spread over the court in sudden enlivening of laughter and shrill words, flitting like little fish in the shallows, running and screaming in impromptu games. Juan stood near the fountain, where the shadow of the lemon trees fell long before the low-sinking sun. He exchanged friendly signals with Borromeo, and Gertrudis came from the door of her classroom to join him. They sat on the bench against the rose trellis the fallen petals like a thin strewing of a first snow at their feet.

"There is plenty to talk about when a man is going to be married," said Borromeo to himself.

It appeared so, beyond a doubt. Borromeo watched them a little while, measured the distance between the sun and the hilltops, which was not more than the breadth of his

thick, broad hand, and went in to gather up his tools after his workmanly rule.

There was the building of the new home to be talked of between Gertrudis and Juan, the adobe bricks for which Padre Ignacio had given them; and the invaluable cooperation of Cristobal, who superintended the transportation of the same. There was the branch of a gray old roble, which overhung a corner of the new house, to be considered, and pleaded for by Gertrudis, who would alter the plans rather than sacrifice it; and there was talk of the sheepfold, how far it should be from the house; and the garden, into which water must be led from the dam across the brook. In short, there was life, and youth, and hope, and confidence; and all the beginning of this vast, new, marvellous undertaking—the establishment of a family, the keystone of man's felicity.

Juan's face was older and graver for the scars his burns had left; not deep nor disfiguring, such as a man wears a beard to conceal, but more as if sorrow had touched his cheeks with searing hands, fixing a cast of sadness upon him which gaiety could not again beguile away. He had trimmed his beard on his cheeks again in the Spanish mode, and his face was browned by sun and wind almost to the color of Padre Ignacio's. There was not a shadow in his clear blue eyes.

Gertrudis carried her little scissors around her neck as before; they were bright against her white dress, lending her an air of domesticity that became her well. The happy termination of her recent sorrow had given her a new vivacity, a poise of maturity and confidence. She faced the future with a smile.

"Governor de Arrillaga was here at midday, Juan, returning from San Diego," she said. "He asked to be remembered."

"As if I could ever forget him! Did he say anything about his decision in the controversy between the padres and the ranchers over the grazing-lands?"

"They discussed it quite openly at the table, Juan. The governor holds their complaints without foundation. There is room enough, he said, for them all without grudging the padres grazing-grounds for their sheep."

"He is a just man, his decision was foreseen. And the people of the pueblo? Did he speak of them?"

"There is more ground for complaint in their case, he said. It is to be arranged, in some way—I do not know how,—to give them more water. Padre Ignacio will tell you. He is downcast over it; he says the mission fields and vineyards must be reduced."

"That is bad news. Still, Padre Mateo at least, expected it. It is the first little advantage of the citizens over the padres, such as Don Geronimo has spoken of gloomily many times here lately as the beginning of the end. The politicians will have their desire with the mission properties before many years have passed over us, Tula. It will be a sad day."

"I used to hear much talk of it before we left Mexico, Juan. There were many who believed the missions were becoming too dominant in Alta California, that they should be curbed in the interest of the pueblos. The viceroy has that belief."

"Interference will be disastrous. Certainly, everybody can't think of the padres as I do, owing them so much, but it would be a terrible blunder for the state to take over the mission properties, as many are clamoring for it to be done, and turn them into the hands of greedy and incompetent political favorites."

"You will be an influential citizen here, Juan; you can work to defeat this unworthy scheme."

"Well, we must not stand under the shadow of a future event that probably is far away," Juan said cheerfully.

"Padre Ignacio says the fountains must be shut off," she said, sadly, "if the peublo is to be given more water. Will our roses die then, Juan?"

"No, they shall never die. We'll take some slips from them and plant them at our home—maybe Padre Ignacio will give us one of the roots of these very plants. So much must perish here when the water is cut off," said Juan, looking around the court, bordered by orange and lemon trees, with apricot and peach standing tall among them.

"Dear trees of San Fernando!" she sighed.

Then talk of the building again, which was more pleasant than the thought of withering, stricken roses and the pathos of dying trees. Youth is happiest when it is building, and planning building that may never taken form beneath its hands. Building is the quickening leaven, it is the very essence of life. There are old men who believe that as long as they can build they will not die.

"We must get ready for dinner," she said at last.

"Yes, there's the sun's last arrow on the hill yonder."

The last of the little girls were whirling in a ring a little way beyond them in the court, chanting some childish game; Borromeo was in his door, letting down his sleeves, his face bright from the strong mission soap, making ready to close his shop for the day; Padre

Ignacio was hurrying along the arcade toward the church, his head bent, his manner rapt as if he walked in a dream.

The evening bell, sounding in measured stroke: one, two, three. At the first note the little girls' hands broke the circle of their whirling dance, the little heads bowed, the little hands fluttered on bosoms, the devout little lips moved in the quick words of earnest prayer; at the first stroke Borromeo bent his head, one sleeve up on his bare arm, and Padre Ignacio stopped suddenly, standing as still as the statue of St. Francis in his brown gown at the altar side. Gertrudis and Juan rose quickly to their feet, their handclasp broken, their heads bowed in prayer.

A moment so. And then the bell, quick, joyous; exulting, it seemed, in the call to weary men in the far fields that their day's work was done. The little girls ran laughing off down the arcade behind Padre Ignacio; Borromeo slipped down his sleeve and closed his doors, the bell calling, calling, its tone now rising, now sinking, its joy unabated, its sweet melody repeating against the rocky hills.

A MINING CAMP BILL-OF-FARE

IN FRANK A. ROOT'S "The Overland Stage to California" is given the following menu from the "El Dorado" eating place of Placerville, Cal., in 1850:

SOUP

Bean	$1.00
Ox-tail (short)	1.50

ROAST

Beef, Mexican (prime cut)	1.50
Beef, up along	1.00
Beef, plain	1.00
Beef, with one potato (Fair size)	1.25
Beef, tame, from the States	1.50

VEGETABLES

Baked beans, plain	.75
Baked beans, greased	1.00
Two potatoes (medium size)	.50
Two potatoes (peeled)	.75

ENTREES

Sauerkraut	1.00
Bacon, fried	1.00
Bacon, stuffed	1.50
Hash, low grade	.75
Hash, 18 carat	1.00

GAME

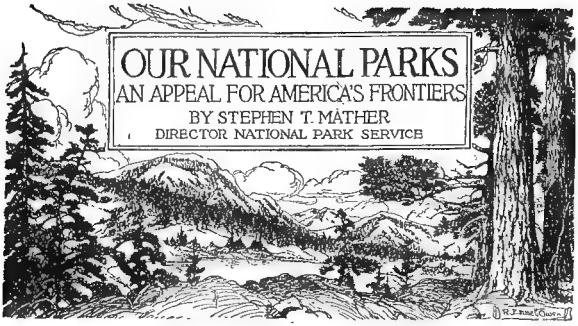
Codfish balls, per pair	.75
Grizzly, roast	1.00
Grizzly, fried	.75
Jack rabbit (whole)	1.00

PASTRY

Rice pudding, plain	.75
Rice pudding, with molasses	1.00
Rice pudding, with brandy peaches	2.00
Square meal, with desert	3.00

Payable in advance.

N. B.—Gold scales at the end of the bar.



OUR NATIONAL PARKS

AN APPEAL FOR AMERICA'S FRONTIERS

BY STEPHEN T. MATHER
DIRECTOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

AMERICA'S frontiers have disappeared, but is it realized how swiftly? It has been only eighty-one years since Fremont set out from Independence, Missouri, with a handful of picked men to explore the Rocky Mountains, then the great unknown. The achievements of the Astorians under Hunt in pushing their way up the Missouri, crossing the Rocky Mountains, penetrating the Columbia River Gorge and establishing the farthest outpost on the Columbia, were accomplished but one hundred and fourteen years ago. It has been only one hundred and twenty years since Lewis and Clark explored the Pacific Northwest with a view to the extension of commerce to the Pacific Ocean. The Verendryes extended their explorations from Canada into North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming but one hundred and eighty years ago, and Coronado pushed up into New Mexico and to the Grand Canyon in Arizona less than four hundred years ago. Tremendous hardships were endured by these intrepid explorers who opened up this mighty Western empire for those hardy pioneers who followed in their footsteps.

It was a rich country the early pioneers traversed. Great forests stretched as far as the eye could see in undisturbed serenity. The plains were covered with rich grasses. Game was plentiful. The deer was present in every piece of woodland, the beaver had his dam in every stream; great herds of buffalo thundered over the plains; and the elk, bear and pigeon furnished meat for the white man and the red man. The supply seemed illimitable. But the covered wagon and the pony express have long since given way to the railroad and to the automobile. Only recently a daring airman crossed from the Atlantic to the Pacific between sunrise and sunset. Communication is now radioed to millions of listeners-in. Rough trails, replete with romance, are replaced by shining concrete ribbons and steel rails flashing in the sunlight.

This almost magical conquering of the wilderness and wide spaces has been accompanied by frightful waste. The magnificent forests to a great extent have passed under the wasteful practices that accompanied lumbering operations of the past. The fur trade early killed its own business by overtrapping, and hide hunters theirs by overshooting. The Western plains soon saw only the bleached bones of elk and buffalo. Overstocking and overgrazing in too many instances paid the penalties of barren, eroded wastes where at one time grass-covered reaches stretched beyond the horizon. Ruthless destruction of the forest cover at the headwaters of our streams has cost millions of dollars through floods that have occurred hundreds of miles away.

Our thoughtless prodigality has given place to a sober realization that in our national life it is imperative to have a strong policy of conservation. The first expression of such a policy was embodied in the act creating Yellowstone National Park in 1872 when this wonderland was "dedicated forever as a pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people." The national park idea from its inception has been one of complete conservation, and yet each year the defenders of the national park system in Congress and out have been called to repel

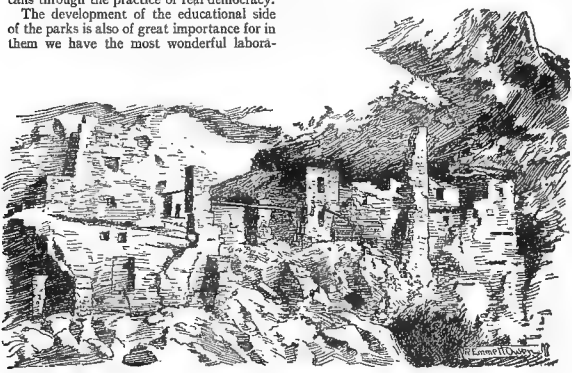
efforts of private interests to invade the parks to utilize some natural resource which, because it belongs to all the people, seemed to belong to no one.

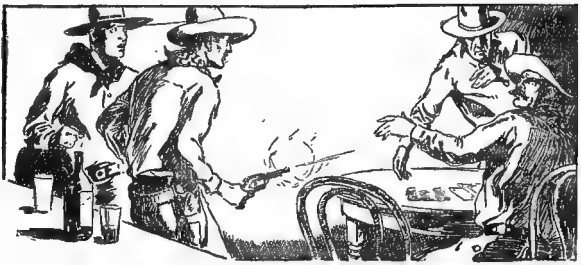
If we are to preserve something of our frontiers which have so swiftly disappeared; if we are to keep unspoiled our finest scenery, with which no other country on earth has been so generously endowed; if we are to save our native game and birds from possible extinction, then the national parks must be held inviolate. As Secretary Work of the Interior Department emphasized in reporting to the recent Congress on a measure to authorize the damming of Yellowstone Lake, "absolute preservation should be the unwavering policy of Yellowstone administration for, inestimably valuable and precious as this great park now is to the nation, it will prove of increasingly greater value with each passing year as the common heritage of coming generations."

The national parks are doing much to keep alive the pioneer spirit that has been the inspiration of America in bringing its citizens out into the healthful revivifying influence of the out-of-doors. Park visitors, hailing from every state and territory, thrown into intimate contact with one another in the public camp grounds are becoming better Americans through the practice of real democracy.

The development of the educational side of the parks is also of great importance for in them we have the most wonderful laboratories for nature study that can be found in the world. In former days Americans were not considered fully cultured unless they had traveled through Europe. I predict that in the future Americans will not be considered cultured unless they have visited our complete system of national parks and have become familiar with the character and history of their own country.

In Mesa Verde Park, for instance, there are the remains of a civilization of unknown antiquity that have challenged the interests of historians and archaeologists throughout the world. The history of the cliff dwellers is part of the history of America and is just as fascinating a study as the history of the primitive people of the Old World. There are no more romantic chapters in history than those of our Western exploration containing some of the most striking events in the life of the people of the United States. It is of these that THE FRONTIER is to tell you, and to its readers is directed this appeal to keep inviolate the remaining bits of America's frontiers in our national parks so that these—our nation's heritage—may be handed down unspoiled to coming generations.





DIXIE

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

White Horse was a hard town in those days when the frontier was new, a tough town where sudden wealth and sudden death ran hand in hand—a fitting scene for the passing of Ike Runyon and for Dixie's coming into her own

FIFTEEN two, fifteen four, fifteen six, an' three is nine, an' out." The cribbage game was over; the old cowman had won the rubber and, shoving back from the table, he stalked to the window and gazed thoughtfully at the storm.

The snow eddied and swirled about the eaves of the bunkhouse and whirled into drifts along the fence line. Tex and I lolled at the table and Milk River Joe put rawhide to soak in the wash dish preparatory to braiding a quirt.

"'Pears like some folks in these parts is pilin' on a heap o' dawg with their big marble gravestones. When I come by from town t'other day, I see they had three of them big white monymints stickin' up 'mongst the wood slabs on Dead Ridge—'stead of two." Milk River Joe spoke slightingly, as though the placing of a marble shaft over a grave were a mark of ostentation not to be condoned.

Tex paused in the rolling of a cigarette: "That might be what yo' think about it, Milk Riveh, but somehow I've always took a fancy to them two white stones, standin' up theh alone, so diffe'nt from the othe's. One day when I was ridin' by I rolled off my cayuse an' clim the fence jest to find out whose they was. One of 'em b'longs to some proffesseh fellow, I don't rec'lect his name, but the otheh—the one that stands off alone oveh clost to the back fence—it says: 'Sacred to the mem'ry of Ike Runyon. Died April the 27th, 1885.' An' undeh that, jest the fo' words: 'He was a Man.' I ain't neveh found out who the pahty was, an' I've asked some consid'ble few folks too. But it's a long time since he cashed in. I reckon them that know'd has fo'got. All the same I neveh pass Dead Ridge without I staht studyin' about who he was an' what he done that someone should loosen up fo' a thousan' dollah stone to put oveh him.

"I reckon it's that theh notice that's onto it, stuck in my craw mo'n the stone: 'He was a Man,' it says—an' the Man paht of it is cut out in big lettehs like they wasn't no two ways about it. Seems like I'd rutheh have that cut oveh me than two foot of po'try tellin' how I was enjoyin' myself blowin' my hahp amongst the angels."

As Tex talked the Old Man turned from the window and stood regarding him with approval. Presently he seated himself and, tilting his chair against the wall, lighted a cigar. When the Old Man assumed this position we prepared to listen to a tale of the good old days "'fore the railroad."

"Yes, it's as Milk River says," he remarked, slowly puffing out the blue smoke, "they's three stones there now an' when the last hand is played out that was dealt that deal they'll be four.

"They ain't many left hereabouts that

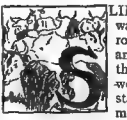
remembers the passin' of Ike Runyon, an' how he came to have a stone shipped all the way from St. Paul an' set up over him. An' when you come to think on it, Ike's takin' off was only a side play of fate in ravelin' out the tangled threads of lives. I c'n see it all now, same as if 'twas yesterday.

"You boys thinks White Horse is some lively now; you'd ought to been here 'long in the '80's—'fore the railroad. Them was the times—she was a real camp then, an' they was real men—'twas the railroad brung in the mailorder catalog cowpunchers an' the tinhorns.

"Everything was wide open, work was plenty an' wages was good; everyone makin' money an' spendin' it fast as they made it. All night long chips rattled an' glasses clinked an' music floated out from the dancehall doors; all kind o' jerky like, an' mixed with singin' an' cursin' an' laughin'—always the laughin'—high-pitched it was, an' nervous, an' necessary. It was the trouble gauge. Too little of it an' in the mornin' men would be ridin' out into the hills, an' in a few days they would come ridin' back; an' from the cottonwoods along some crick, *things* would be swingin' slow like in the wind with the buzzards circlin' over 'em. After that the chips would rattle an' the glasses clink, an' again the music, an' the cursin', an' the laughin'.

"Some nights they'd be too much of it; louder an' higher strung it would get an' the music would go faster, the stakes would get higher, an' more glasses would clink an' smash. All to oncet a gun would crack somewhere in the thick of it, an' another, an' another, an' hell would be broke loose. Women runnin' screamin' out the doors, men shootin' an' fightin', with the air fogged up so thick you couldn't see. Some layin' flat to get out of range, an' some shootin' right an' left where the smoke swirled. An' the crash of glass when a bullet would rake the backbar. Then all at oncet it would stop. The smoke would drift out the doors an' men would be ruisin' offen the floor, an' some standin' with their backs to the wall lookin' foolish at their empty guns. The women would come crowdin' in, everyone askin' who started it, an' like as not no one could tell—an' damned few cared.

"The barkeeps would rake out the broken glass an' mop up the spilt licker, an' set out a row of fresh bottles an' glasses. The dealer would finger the box, the little ball would spin 'round the wheel, an' again the sound of chips, an' glasses, an' the music, an' the laughin'—always the laughin'. In the mornin' the camp would turn out an' travel slow over to Dead Ridge, packin' picks an' shovels an' some pine slabs, an' in front some things in blankets—the ones which didn't raise offen the floor.



SLIM PASQUERT an' me was pardners them days, rode the range together an' went together with the trail herds. When we'd made us a grubstake we'd hit fer the mountains, prospectin' an' trappin'. Slim was consid'ble younger'n me but I sure did like him. He was quiet an' easy goin', which same fooled a good many 'fore they come to know him. I've saw him gentle consid'ble of these here wolves what reckoned it was their night to howl. Him bein' so youngish an' onobstreperous lookin', he'd get picked out fer the goat frequent. The same party never done it but oncet, but the pop'lation in them days was consid'ble floatin', an' 'bout the time as Slim'd get his standin' 'stablished in camp, in would drift a fresh bunch of frolickers a-honin' fer joy, an' seemed like they jest natch'ly picked out Slim fer to exuberate on.

"Good lookin' too, barrin' a curious scar on his forehead—birthmark it was, an' I could tell how mad he'd got by the redness of it. Always made a hit with the women—not that he cared fer 'em in partic'lar, neither—danced with 'em an' bought 'em drinks same as the rest of us, but he always got the pick of the bunch an we'd take what was left.

"I don't go much on these here dancehall women, but oncet in a while there's one that's different. Dixie was. Us old-timers all recollects her. She's the onliest one of the whole lot that's remembered now, the rest of 'em—even their names is forgot, an' should be. She had a head, an' she had a heart, an' she used 'em both. In some partic'lars she was the same as the rest but—well—she wasn't no more like 'em than black's like white.

"She was a gambler, an' a good one, but square as a die. Seemed like she was jest natch'ly lucky an' she made a heap of money; that's how she come by her name. 'Long 'bout that time the Dixie Lode over on Tin Cup opened up an' it was the richest strike ever made in Choteau County.

"Kid Owens run the Eldorado then, an' that spring the Dixie developed so big the gold jest rolled into White Horse an' the Kid was corrallin' in the heft of it. One night when things was runnin' full swing, in drifts this here woman. She looks on at the different tables awhile till she fetched up to the layout where Kid was a-dealin'. Directly she begun to play, easy at first an',

slow, like she was studyin' the run of the cards; then she begun to play higher an' higher. Sometimes she'd lose but most times she'd win, till her play hit the limit. The limit at Kid's was five thousan', an' it wasn't often it was hit, even in them days. Everyone else had dropped out an' was crowded 'round watchin' the deal. She played 'long fer a spell an' then she kinda yawned like an' she says to Kid, she says; 'Maybe you'd like to play a real game.' The Kid he hesitates a second, then he says: 'Anything to 'commodate a lady; the limit's off.'

"Right then started the biggest game ever played in these parts. The woman kep' her eyes on the cards; she took her time an' made her bets slow, an' she kep' a winnin'. Them lookin' on seen Kid was gettin' nervous; his hand shuck a little when he dolt an' he wiped his forehead frequent. 'Long 'bout daylight Kid looked up an' kinda laughed. 'Well, you done the trick,' he says; 'the bank's busted.' She studied fer a minute an' then she says: 'What's yer layout worth—the whole outfit jest as she stands?' The Kid 'lowed forty-thousan'd cover it. 'I'll play you fer it; er I'll pay you fer it,' she says.

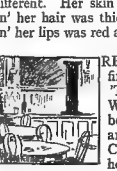
"Spite of him tryin' not to let on, everyone seen that she had him plumb buffaloed. His face had went a pasty white color as he set there rifflin' the cards, an' little beads stood on his forehead like dew on a tombstone. His nerve was gone. He wet his lips with his tongue, an' when he spoke his voice sounded high-strung an' onnatch'el. "Pay me," he says; "I ain't got no chanct to beat you. I'll never turn another card agin' a woman."

"She counted out the cash, arrangin' it careful in little stacks. 'Talk 'bout yer Dixie strikes!' says Ike Runyon, lookin' on. The Kid goes over to the bar an' writes out a bill of sale; 'fore he starts he stops. 'What name?' he says. She kinda hesitates a minute: 'Why—why—oh, jest Dixie,' she says, smilin' over at Ike as she run her fingers through the little stacks of yeller boys in front of her. So that's the way he made it out, transferrin' to Dixie, fer the sum of forty thousan' dollars to him in hand paid, all his holdin's real an' unreal, in the heavens above, earth beneath, an' the waters in—under it, lock stock an' barrel, heirs an' assigns fer ever an' ever, s'elp me God, till death do us part, world without end amen, er words to that effec'.

"I said she was a good woman, an' she was; never made no hurrah 'bout it neither, but many's the poor devil 'twill always remember the good of her, fer she done a thousan' times more good than she ever done harm, an' that's more'n the heft of us can say. She'd brace a man up when he felt plumb down an' out, an' send him back to the range thinkin' of them big smilin' eyes an' the kind words ringin' in his ears, an' with his own outfit under him after the barkeeps had held it a week agin' the booze he couldn't pay fer. I could set here all day an' tell of things she done fer folks; an' she always done it so's you thought you was the one 'twas favorin' her.

"She must of been risin' thirty-five when she blowed into White Horse—that was in the spring of '80—an' a finer lookin' woman I never see, tall an' dark, an' big soft, brown eyes; she could smile with them eyes without ever movin' her lips. But most always they was sad lookin', an' far off, like she was thinkin' of things past an' gone. She was game though, talked lively, an' laughed an' danced, played cards an' drank some; but her heart wasn't in it. Some of us seen it an' we'd try an' make her have the good time that she wanted, but 'twasn't no use.

"She 'peared happy enough, an' I reckon she fooled most folks, but, as I say, they was some of us that knowed it was a bluff, an' we liked her better fer her gameness. You'd natch'ly think that the life she 'peared to live would show up in her looks—you know the kind, with their painted faces an' cold, hard eyes—but not her. She was different. Her skin was clear as a baby's, an' her hair was thick an' glossy an' black, an' her lips was red an' curvin'.



REC'LECT the night she first seen Slim Pasquert. 'Twas in the fall of '83. We was gatherin' the beef herd fer the trail, an' camped on the flats. Course, all of us 'twasn't holdin' herd spent our nights in White Horse. Me an' Slim was off guard that night so we saddled up after we'd et an' high-tailed fer the bright lights a-winkin' acrost the flats. We fooled 'round a while, here an' there, an' presently we drifted into Dixie's Eldorado. Things was goin' full tilt an' we danced a spell an' had a couple of drinks an' then loafed over to the tables. We didn't surmise to play none, 'count of pay-day bein' so far on the back trail.

"Dixie was dealin' when we fetched up there, an', bein' as Old Man Moore an' Ike Runyon was playin', the game run some hefty. Me an' Slim looked on 'long of six er seven more an' at the end of the deal Dixie matched up Moore's stack an' raked in

Ike's. Then she looked up. She nodded to me an' was 'bout to speak when her eye happened to fall on Slim. Boys, you'd of thought she seen a ghost. Her breath drawed in quick an' catchy, like it was sucked through a chain pump, an' the box she was holdin' clattered on the floor, but she got holt of herself quick.

"Slim never seen the look she give him, bein' took up with tryin' to figger how much dinero was in Old Man Moore's stack. She set there a minute an' then she kinda catched at her throat an' stood up. 'The game's closed, boys; I—I'm sick,' she says. I seen she was mighty shaky, so I helps her over to the dancehall an' a couple of the girls took her back to her room.

"I went over to the bar where Old Man Moore was settin' 'em up an' growlin' 'bout his luck, him havin' to quit on a winnin' streak; not that he blamed Dixie—he knowed she wasn't no piker. After we'd lickered I seen one of the girls motionin' by the dancehall door, so I aidged acrost. 'Dixie wants to see you a minute,' she whispers. I follered back an' found her layin' on a lounge an' whiter'n the top of Big Baldy. They was dark rings in under her eyes an' she looked ten years older. The girls had undid her collar an' it lopped down on her dress.

"'Dave,' she says, 'Dave, who is that boy?'

"'What boy?' I says.

"'You know what boy! The one standin' by you watchin' the game. What's his name? Where did he come from? Tell me all you know about him. Please, Dave, tell me; I must know.'

"I can't talk it like her. Seemed like she come by schoolmarm lingo natch'el. I was in consid'ble of a quandér, me feelin' sorry fer her, but, at that, it ain't no man's business to publish out a friend's past performances. She seen I was studyin' an' she reached out an' took holt of my hand.

"'Set down,' she says, soft like. I set on the aidge of the lounge.

"'Look here, Dave, ain't I always been on the square—with you, an' with everyone?'

I nodded.

"Ain't I always helped the boys when they needed it?'

"'Sure,' I says.

"'Dave,' she says, 'I know I ain't a good woman. I'm mighty far from it, I'm a gambler an'—an'—that's all. I wasn't always what I am; sometimes I think you've guessed that, you an' a few of the boys. But you never let on. You've tried to help me forget without my knowin' it, but I do know, Dave. Oh, if I could jest tell someone what I've suffered.' She choked up an' big tears was trailin' down her cheeks. 'Dave, I'm askin' you in the name of what I once was, please tell me. It means so much to me, an' I have so little left.'

"I hadn't never saw a woman cry till then. Seemed like I wanted to squawk myself. I snorted an' swallered a time or two an' when I tried to say somethin' I made a noise like someone stepped on the pup's tail. I was plumb 'shamed of myself; no one hadn't never talked that-away to me, an', as the feller says, it got my goat. At last I busted out an' told her everything I knowed 'bout Slim, an' I reckon it was the heft of what he knowed 'bout hisself. Him an' me bunked together an' when we'd be layin' there in our blankets of a night, with the stars a-shinin' an' no sound but the scrunch an' grind of the beef herd an' the song of the night guard soundin' far off an' dreamy, he'd open up an' talk, an' talk, an' I'd lay an' listen till I drowsed off.

"'Peared like she never would get tired hearin' 'bout him. I'd tell a while an' stop an' she'd ask some question or 'nother an' I'd start agin. I told 'bout him bein' in some school—boardin' school, he called it, back East somewheres—an' 'bout him blowin' the outfit an' boltin' fer Texas when he was twelve. How he had follered the dogies since, him bein' twenty then, an' 'bout him trailin' up with the old Long X an' blowin' 'em fer the Circle C.

"When I told 'bout how we was on trail with the beef, an' wouldn't be back till clost onto spring, she says:

"'Do you reckon he'll come back 'long of you an' the boys?'

"'You're gettin' too deep fer me,' I says, 'You know the cow country an' you know that none of us mightn't come back. Even barrin' accidents, the trail is long, an' while we like our job an' the range an' the folks, that ain't sayin' we won't find none we like better.'

"'That's true,' she says. 'But you always have come back, an' this time you must try to bring him with you.'

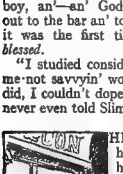
"'I'll try,' I says, 'but you c'n lay your bet that if he feels like comin' he'll come, an' if he don't feel like comin' all hell can't fetch him.'

"She laid there so long with her eyes shet that I jedged she'd fell to sleep, so I started sneakin' out. Never till then did I sense what an all-fired racket them old big rowel spurs an' janglers kicks up. I'd made it 'bout half ways to the door without no more noise than a weddin' charivari, when she opens her eyes an' says; 'You didn't tell me how he got that scar.'

"'No,' I says, 'an' neither c'n he, but I reckon his mother could.' She took an awful spell of coughin' jest then an' I dug out fer to get her some whisky, but time I come back she was over it. She leant over an' took up my hand in the two of hern an' her voice sounded husky like.

"Thank you, Dave,' she says, 'be a good boy, an'—an' God bless you.' I walked out to the bar an' took three drinks straight, it was the first time I'd ever been God *blessed*.

"I studied consid'ble over the thing, but me not savvyin' women no better'n what I did, I couldn't dope it out, so I stood pat—never even told Slim."



THE Old Man shifted in his chair and relighted his cigar and, while Milk River Joe cut long strips of rawhide, he resumed.

"Well, we did come back that year an' whenever we'd hit White Horse Dixie'd have an' eye on Slim. She tried not to show it, but, shucks, any one couldn't help but notice. The boys got to devilin' him 'bout it an' at first he didn't mind none, laughed 'long of the rest, but bymbye he got sore 'n busted a few heads now'n then.

"One mornin' jest 'fore the round-up me an' Slim walks into the Eldorado an' calls for a couple of drinks. Slim had been jambereein' the night b'fore an' he wasn't none ami'ble, had jest 'nough of a holdover to feel onery an' not 'nough mornin's mornin' to balance off. Ike Runyon an' four or five T U boys was settin' over to a table playin' stud, an' when Slim ordered the third drink we all refused, which that didn't humor him up none. Now, it ain't good a man should drink alone, but Slim stood at the bar an' poured out his licker. As he was raisin' the glass Dixie slips in an' lays her hand on his arm.

"'Don't drink that,' she says. 'Go acrost to the hotel an' get a good hot breakfast. It'll do you a heap more good.'

"Slim turned 'round with a snarl: 'You mind your own business, you ——— ———!'

"Dixie cringed back like she'd been struck in the face, an' her voice sounded like a moan. 'No, no, no, never *that*!'

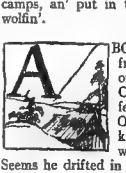
"From acrost the room come the short, nasty rasp of a chair shoved back. Slim heard it an' whirled. A gun roared, an' Ike Runyon sunk slow acrost the table 'mongst the cards and chips.

"I looked 'round fer Dixie, but she was gone. Slim stood there lookin' from one to the other, but no one took it up. Of course, Ike had drawed first but, bein' as things was, Slim didn't make no friends by his quick gunplay. We carried Ike over to Dead Ridge after dinner an' when we got back Slim had rode. I hung 'round awhile an' managed to slip a note under Dixie's door, tellin' how Slim had throwed that drink on the floor an' gone over an' et; someways I thought she'd like to know.

"After that Slim was different; didn't have much to say to no one, not even me. He quit ridin' to town with us an' the boys figgered he was layin' fer to go bad. We always managed to slip a few bottles into camp past old Brewster, an' when he wasn't 'round we'd pass 'em back an' forth. Slim never refused his turn but soon I noticed that he was takin' his drinks with his tongue over the mouth of the bottle. After that, I savvied he wasn't breedin' trouble. He seen he'd did a thing he couldn't never undo, an' he know'd it was the whisky made him do it.

"Course, the shootin', after things got that far—it was him or Ike, but it was the name he called Dixie made Ike draw. I felt sorry fer the boy but I never let on, an' I didn't wise up the bunch; things like that a man's got to work out fer hisself.

"That fall me an' Slim didn't go on the beef trail. We drifted over on the South Slope, patched up one of the old Lazy Y line camps, an' put in the winter trappin' an' wolfin'.



ABOUT ten mile acrost from where we was, up on the head of Black Coulee, lived a curus old feller that folks called Old Lonesome. No one knowed his name nor where he come from. Seems he drifted in 'long in the early '70's an' squatted in an' old prospector's cabin. Queer lookin' cuss he was, with his long white hair an' smooth shaved face an' hawk-bill nose. Folks said he was loco. Didn't have a brute beast on the place, jest set 'round an' read books all day an' half the night, when he wasn't rangin' up in the mountains afoot. We used to pass his cabin frequent, us havin' a line of wolf traps over on Box Elder. Sometimes we'd see him settin' by the window readin' but he never took no notice of us.

"One day when it was workin' 'long toward spring, we was ridin' a line of traps up agin' the foot of Tiger Butte. It had thawed consid'ble much the day before an' the goin' was mighty pernickity, 'special as our horses

had wore all their cork off. All to oncet my horse give a snort an' a sideways jump that nigh fetched me, an' there, at the foot of a rock ledge, laid Old Lonesome. He wasn't dead but we could see he was all in, an' a good six mile from his cabin. It was the devil's own job gettin' him home, 'cause he sure was busted up. One leg broke, chest kinda caved in, an' a big ugly cut acrost his head. We fixed him up best we could with liniment an' bandages, but I savvied, first off, 'twasn't no use. We built up the fire an' set 'round waitin' fer the end.

"He laid still fer a long spell, an' several times we thought he'd quit breathin', but he was a tough old pilgrim fer all he didn't look it, an' bymbye he begun to get res'less. He moved a little on the bunk an' took to mutterin', an' now an' then throwed a groan when the pain would catch him sharp. I mixed up some whisky an' water middlin' stout an' we fed it to him. It done him good. His breath came a little stronger an' more reg'lar an' a little life color came into his face, which before that he'd been paper-white, like all the blood had been dreened out of him. It run 'long thataway till 'bout midnight when Slim stepped to the bed fer to give him another dose of hot whisky.

"'Come here,' he says, 'he's came to!' I went over, an', sure 'nough, his eyes was wide open a-lookin' at us kinda dazed like; seemed like he was tryin' to rec'lect where he was at.

"'You're all right, Old Timer,' Slim says kinda soothin' like as he stoops over the bunk, 'Jest you lay still an' take it easy!'

"He laid there lookin' at us fer a spell an' then he asked fer a drink of water, an' his hand went to his chest where his ribs was stove in. He drunk the water an' then he says how he seen he didn't have long to live.

"'They didn't 'pear to be no sense in lyin' to him, so I says: 'You can't never tell 'bout such things, but even at that, you've lived quite some consid'ble spell an' ready.'

"'Too long! Too long!' he says, 'I shall welcome death which will put an end to my miserable existence.'

"'Been ailin'?' I asks, feelin' sort of mean 'bout us not bein' better neighbors to him.

"'No, physically I have been well, but for years I have mentally suffered the tortures of the damned.' I rec'lected what folks said 'bout him bein' loco.

"'That sure is hell,' I agrees, feelin' it best not to rile him. He started in to say somethin' but the blood from his busted lungs clogged up his throat an' he fought fer breath. I thought he was a goner fer sure, but we got some whisky down him an' he eased off, an' after a spell he tackles it agin:

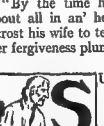
"'Gentlemen,' he says, 'I don't know who you are nor what brings you here, but I realize that my hours are numbered an' before I die I must unburden myself to a fellow human.'

"'Sure thing,' says Slim, 'get it out of yer system if it'll help you any, but if I was you I'd shut up an' take it easy. 'Nother one of them spells an' you'll sure cash in.'

"But Old Lonesome wouldn't hear to it an' he starts in an' tells 'bout how he was a perfesser in some college back East an' 'bout him gittin' married long in the '60's—I rec'lect thinkin' at the time that there couldn't be no girl as pretty an' han'some as what he told. An' how they lived happy an' had a little kid, finest little kid in the world he claimed, an' had a birthmark on his head, an' how, after the kid had got a couple of year old er so, he started in gettin' jealous of his wife. An' how one day he catched her in the garden with a man an' he seen him kiss her when he went away.

"Then he told 'bout firin' her out without givin' her no chanct to explain, an' how he found out after that it was her brother which he hadn't never saw, an' how he got the kid took care of by a aunt of hissen, an' quit his job an' started huntin' fer his wife. Seems like he spent consid'ble many years at it, goin' from one place to another an' from one country to another, an' when the kid got big 'nough he put him in a school. He never found her, an' one time when he went to see the kid they told him he'd skipped out. An' he told 'bout how at last he give up an' come out to the South Slope where he could hate hisself unint'rupted.

"By the time he'd got through he was 'bout all in an' he told us if we ever run acrost his wife to tell her how he was huntin' her fergiveness plumb to the last.



SURE thing, old-timer,' says Slim, thinkin' to humor him up. 'But what might yer name be, so's in case we'd ever meet up with the lady we'd know she was her.'

"'My name?' he says, 'Oh, yes, my name is Edward Henry Pasquert.'

"'Pasquert!' says Slim, almost yellin' it out as he leant half out of his chair an' stared at the old man. 'Pasquert, did you say? An' you say how that kid had a birthmark on his forehead—*like this?*' He turned his

head so't his face showed plain, an' shoved his hat back. The scar glowed brick-red in the lamp light. The old man stared at it an' struggled to raise up but he fell back with a groan.

"'My boy! my boy!' he says, kinda chokey like. 'My little son! At last—after all these years!' He worked one hand out an' stretched it, shakin' toward Slim.

"An' Slim he set there like he was petrified, borin' the old man through with them eyes of hissen. When he seen that 'tremblin' old hand reachin' out to him, he fetches up onto his feet with a jerk.

"'No!' he roars. 'By God, no! Where's the woman it was up to you to look out fer an' take care of? *Damn you! Where's my mother?*' Without another word he turned an', crossin' over to the door, went out.

"The old man settled back like he was stunned; his breath come in big chokin' gasps.

"'Come back—son—forgive—I need you so—at the—last.' He motioned me to come closter an' fumbled fer his pocket. 'Her picture—give—him.'

"His hand dropped limp on the blanket an' I took the picture an' stuck it in my pocket an' started out after Slim. I was mad clean down to my boot heels, an' I aimed to bring Slim back if I had to beat him up an' drag him in an' choke the fergiveness out of him. I sure was sorry fer the old feller. Course the way he done her was plumb wrong but, God knows, he'd suffered for that, an', bein' as he was dyin', Slim didn't have no call to do like he done.

"I went out. It was cold, an' the stars winked bright above Big Baldy an' 'round the jagged edges of Saw Tooth. When my eyes got use' to the dark I seen Slim leanin' up agin' the old broke-down horse corral. His face was covered up in his arms an' his hat had fell off an' was layin' on the snow. His shoulders was heavin' till they shook his whole body an' the old loose corral too. There wasn't no sound, jest that dry jerky heave of the shoulders. I never seen a man similar an' I never want to; it's too deep—they're feelin' too much.

"As I stood lookin' at him all the mad died out of me; I see the thing from his slant. But jest the same I wanted he should go in an' call it quits with the old man—him a-dyin' that way, so I walks over an' lays my hand on his shoulder.

"'Slim,' I says, 'he's suffered a thousan' times more'n what you have, 'cause he loved her an' he knows what he's missed. Go in an' tell him you don't hold it agin' him. What he done was in a fit of temper like—like when you called that name to Dixie an' had to kill Ike Runyon fer it.' He turned like he was goin' to speak an' fer a minute he stood lookin' far out over the peaks, where the stars glittered an' the pines showed black agin' the snow. Then he went in an' I picked up his hat an' follered. He'd left the door open an' when I got to it I stopped. He was kneelin' by the side of the bed with one arm throwed across the old man an' the limp white hand in hissen.

"'Dad, Dad,' he was sayin', 'I've came back to you. You'll fergive me, won't you? It's our temper, Dad; it's in the blood. Oh, I'm sorry—sorry——'

"Then the tears come an' done him good—but the old man never knowed.

"In the mornin' Slim an' me rigged up a pole drag to take the body as far as Moore's. There he could get a spring wagon an' take his father on to town so's he could be buried decent on Dead Ridge. I stayed to look after the traps, an' that evenin' when I was cookin' supper I happened to run my hand in the pocket of my coat an' drawed out the picture that I'd fergot to give to Slim.

"I took it over to the light an' looked at it an' I seen right there that the old man hadn't bragged her up none in the tellin', an' yet, as I looked, it seemed to me that I had saw that face somewheres; they was somethin' familiar 'bout it. I stood there studyin' quite a spell, an' all to oncet it come to me—it was the eyes, them big, smilin' eyes. Right then a whole heap of things wised into my head. I stuck the picture back in my pocket, bolted what grub was handy, an' caught up my cayuse.

"In ten minutes I was only hittin' the high places to Moore's. They told me how Slim had been there 'bout noon, got a team an' spring wagon an' pulled out, so I trailed along. At Lloyd I woke up Jake LaFranz an' found out that he'd stopped an' et supper there. I figgered he couldn't no more'n make Thompson's that night so I dusted on. I'd got wise to his wagon track so, when I come to Thompson's lane, I piled off an' lit some matches. Slim hadn't turned in an' I knowned I was up agin' a forty mile stretch of bench to White Horse, barrin' the chance of him makin' a dry camp.

"They was a bunch of saddle horses in Thompson's corral so I turned mine in an' caught me up a fresh one. The way I took after Slim wasn't none slow. It was dark but I knowed the horse would keep the trail, so I rode on a loose rein an' throwed the rowels into him.

WHEN I rounded Snake Butte I catched the rattle of wheels ahead where he went clatterin' down into the coulee at Twelve-mile. I let out a whoop an' dug in my spurs an' the next thing I knowed me an' that horse was a-rollin' down-hill where the trail drops offen the corner of the butte. First I'd be on top, then the horse, an' him thrashin' out with his laigs like the devil beatin' tan-bark. One of my spurs had got hung up in the cinch an' doggone me if I could kick loose nohow. D'rectly we come to the bottom an' laid still.

"I tried to move an' a bunch of pains went shootin' up my left arm all hot an' sudden, like them blades of blue colored lightnin' that slashes 'mongst the peaks when one of them real thunder storms hits the divide. I didn't waste no time though, 'cause I didn't know how long 'twould suit that horse to lay still, so I worked my right hand down an' after some consid'ble twistin' an' pullin' I loosed my spur strap. Gradual, I eased my arm out from in under the horse an' got him up, but he was stove up so bad he couldn't even limp decent, so I pulled off the saddle an' bridle an' turned him loose. My arm was broke in two places so I rigged up a sling an' hit the trail afoot.

"From then on I don't rec'lect much except that my boots hurt my feet an' I tried to pull 'em off, but I couldn't make it, one-handed. I kep' a goin,' but I must of got light headed, what with the pain in my arm an' the want of water. Anyways the last thing I know I left the trail an' headed up Big Dry, huntin' a drink.

"When I opened my eyes agin I was layin' in a bed with sheets on. I studied quite a spell 'bout them sheets, but I couldn't make nothin' of it, so I begun to look 'round a little. I seen they was a woman settin' by the bed an' I aidged my head 'round so's to get a look at her when I felt a soft, cool hand on my forehead.

"'Feelin' better, Dave?' she asked.

"'Sure,' I says. Then I looked up an seen it was Dixie, an' all to oncet the whole thing came back to me.

"'Have you saw Slim?' I asked.

"She smiled an' smoothed back my hair, gentle like, with her fingers.

"'He'll be in 'fore long. He went over to the bank on business.'

"'Where am I at?'

"'Right here in White Horse, in the hotel.'

"'Hotel!' I says. 'In White Horse!' An' I eyed them sheets. Then I figgered out that they must of stuck me in the dude room they kep' fer drummers.

"Seemed funny to me 'bout Slim havin' business at the bank, but I was plumb worried 'bout how to keep Dixie away from the old man till they got him planted. Y'see she gen'ally helped 'round folks that way, seein' to it that their eyes was closed an' such, 'fore they was carried over to Dead Ridge; an' I'd got it doped out that if ever she got a good look at him she'd rec'nize him an' prob'ly go all to pieces. Then all of a sudden Slim'd find out that she was his mother an'—well, I didn't know how he'd take it, bein' as things was. A man couldn't never tell which way Slim'd jump, an' I wanted the chanct to break it to him easy. Direc'ly I hit on a scheme.

"'I ain't feelin' none too good, Dixie,' I says. 'Seems like I'm gettin' worse. I reckon Slim's gone over to tend to buryin' a friend of ourn that died over on the South Slope. He wasn't none of the boys that hung 'round White Horse, so you won't care to go over to the Ridge. If you'll stick here an' sort of keep an eye on me, I'll take it mighty kind.'

"'Dave, why are you so anxious to keep me away from there?'

"'I ain't,' I lied. 'I don't care none if you want to go, but fact is I'm 'fraid I'm bad off an' I'd kinda like to have someone 'round case of anythin' should happen. Course, though,' I says, meanin' fer my words to sound pitiful an' dis'pointed, 'if you'd ruther go, why go ahead, only I kinda thought that maybe——'

"'There, there, boy,' she says, an' she looked at me with them big soft eyes of hern, an' then leant over an' kissed me, 'I know now what sent you tearin' over the trail all through that long, dark night, killin' horses an' nearly killin' yerself. But all that was two weeks ago, Dave. I saw him—my husband—layin' cold in death, an' I heard the story of his long search an' his sufferin' from the lips of my own son— my little boy, who has growed up into a big boy now, an' a wild, thoughtless boy sometimes; but all that's past. I've sold the Eldorado an' we're goin' back East, my boy an' I, to begin life all over agin.'

"'Then Slim knows?'

"'Yes, he was there when I looked down an' saw the face of my husband, so white an' still on the blanket. But I can't understand how you guessed who I am.'

"'The picture,' I says. 'It's in my coat

pocket. He give it to me fer Slim, an' I plumb fergot it till evenin'.'

"She carried it over to the window an' was still lookin' at it when we heard footsteps comin' up the stairs an scrapin' 'long the hall, like a feller does when he tries to walk soft in high heeled boots. Then the door opened an' Slim come in.

"Hello, Dave,' he says. 'Woke up at last, did you? How you feelin'?'

"'Fine,' I says.

"Then he went over to where Dixie was by the window, he slipped his arm 'round her an' brung her over to the bed.

"'My mother, Dave,' he says, an' he bent down an' kissed her.

"'I know,' I says, an' I shut my eyes to keep the tears from splatterin' over them sheets.

THE next couple of weeks I put in gettin' back my strength. In a few days I could set up an' Dixie clost herded me like she was my own mother. We'd set an' talk an' she'd read to me by the hour. Slim wasn't 'round much an' when I'd ask where he was at, she'd say he was off tendin' to some business. I soon got so I could walk 'round town a little, pleasant days. Slim drifted in one night an' in the mornin' the three of us et breakfast together. It was a bright, sunshiny day an' the feel of spring was warm in the air.

"'Dave,' Slim says, after he'd rolled him a cigarette, 'd'you feel strong 'nough to take a drive?"

"'Sure,' I says. So he got a rig an' me an' Dixie piled in.

"Where you headin' fer?' I asks, when I seen he had took the Clear Crick trail.

"'Thought we'd drift out an' spend the night at the Y bar,' he says, kinda casual.

"Any old place suits me, but I didn't know you an' McAdams hit it off so doggone thick,'" I says, thinkin' of a certain head-punchin' McAdams had fell heir to, a year or so previous, 'long of him underestimatin' Slim's usefulness with his lunch hooks.

"'Oh, me an' Mac has come to terms all right, 'an' him an' Dixie swapped laughs.

"'Long 'bout four o'clock we come to the Y bar lane. One of McAdams's cow-hands come 'long an' he climbs down an' opens the gate.

"'Say,' he hollers, as we drove through, 'how 'bout that——'

"'Oh, yes, that saddle trace?' cuts in Slim. 'Well, come up to the house this evenin' an' we'll talk it over.' He drove on, leavin' the puncher standin' by the gate lookin' like he was locoed.

"Slim pulled up in front of the house an' hitched the team, then he helps me an' Dixie down an' we follers him into the house. 'Peared to me Slim was actin' almighty familiar like 'round McAdams's ranch, but that wasn't a patchin' to what he done next.

"'Hey, you Chop Suey,' he yells, an' direc'ly a grin-faced chink sticks his head through the kitchen doorway.

"'You get a hump on an' have supper early. We're hungry—see.' The chink seen all right, jedgin' by the hustlin' that sounded from the kitchen.

"'Want to look 'round a while an' stretch yer laigs?' says Slim. So we walked down by the horse corrals an' stables, an' took a peek in the bunkhouse, an' looked over all the wagons an' mowers an' stuff in the machinery shed; then we went back to the house an' set on the porch.

"'Where's McAdams an' the missus?' I asks.

"'I don't know; down to Benton, I reckon. That's where they said they was goin'. How d'you like the layout, Dave?'

"'How do I like it?' I says, 'Why every one knows the Y bar's one of the best outfits in the country. But what gets me is the way you go sashayin' 'round like you owned the place.

"'I do,' he says, fishin' in his pockets fer his papers an' tobacco, 'that is, she bought it,' reachin' over an' takin' one of Dixie's hands.

"'By gosh!' I says, struck all of a heap with Slim's good luck. 'You sure made a good buy. This here outfit had ought to pay sixty percent.' Then I figgers on hittin' a lick fer myself. "'Say,' I says, 'you'll be needin' a good wagon boss that knows the range. How 'bout me?' thinkin' I might's well hit him fer a good job as a common one.

"'No,' he says, 'old Hank Evers stays with the outfit. He's as good a foreman as a man wants.'

"'Well,' I says, laughin' a little so's they wouldn't notice I was disappointed, "'you'll sure give me a job ridin' at forty per?'

"'No, I can't even do that, Dave. Y'see, we got 'bout all the riders we need right now,' he says, lookin' down at his boots.

"I felt like I'd been hit with a club. I thought them two was the best friends I had in the world, an' here they wouldn't give me a measly forty-dollar job, an' right when I needed a job too. It got my goat, as the feller says. I was that discouraged I felt

plumb down an' out, an' there was a sort of drawin', sickish feelin' 'round the pit of my stomach. Then Slim began to talk.

"'Y'see, Dave, it's like this—' Right there I braced up an' got mad.

"'You needn't bother to explain,' I says, tryin' hard to hold my voice even. 'I don't need yer damn job, nohow. I got to be driftin' now, an' if you'll be so kind as to *rent* me a horse I'll pull out fer the Circle C. I reckon Brewster c'n put me to work.'

"I got up an' started 'round to the bunk-house. I wasn't very strong yet an' I hadn't got more'n a rope's length away till Dixie catched up with me. First thing I knowed she had one of my hands corraled an' her other arm was 'round my belt line an' she was walkin' me back where I come from. There was tears in her eyes, but she was smilin'.

"'I find I've got two big boys to look after, 'stead of only one,' she says. 'An' sometimes they're mighty hard to manage. Now, Dave Crosby, you set right down there an' listen to what I've got to say, an' don't you dare open your mouth till I'm through. Do you hear?'

"I heard all right, but by that time I was so mixed up in my feelin's that I didn't know whether I was afoot or ahorseback, so I set down an' shut up.

"'I told you b'fore that we're goin' back East to live,' she says, 'but I heard that this ranch was for sale, an' I saw it was a good investment so I bought it. The only thing I needed was a pardner, a reliable managin' pardner, an' I knowed where I could get him. In fact, he couldn't get away 'cause he was flat on his back with a broken arm an' a touch of brain fever.

"How does it strike you, Mr. Pardner—a half interest in the whole outfit an' you stay right here an' make it pay. Wait-a minute; you're not goin' to say you can't do it. It's too late to refuse, 'cause the papers are all made out. An' anyway, Dave, you couldn't go back on yer friends, could you?' There it was agin, jest the way she always done, her makin' out like I was doin' her the biggest kind of a favor acceptin' a half interest in a two-hundred-thousan'-dollar cow outfit.

"That's how I got my start, which is another little side play of Fate in ravelin' out the tangle of them lives.

A FEW days later they left fer back East, an' in a little while them two stones come out—one fer the old man, an' one fer Ike Runyon. I'm glad Slim remembered Ike. Last winter Dixie died an' Slim brung her out an' laid her beside her husband. Queer, ain't it, how them two will lay there ferever, not ten foot apart, after him spendin' years of his life an' huntin' half the world over to find her? An' then to think that he never knowed how things worked out.

"There was only Slim an' me to foller her body out to the Ridge, an' I'm glad it was so. A couple of weeks ago the stone was set up over her. It's the same as the other two, only it's got her name cut onto it an' underneath, jest the one word—Dixie."

The Old Man stalked to the window and stared out at the slashing slants of wind-hurled snow.

"Fate sure deals some funny hands in the big game," he said, "an' sometimes it looks like she makes a misdeal."

KING CHARLEY

POSSIBLY the most notorious frontier character living in the vicinity of the forks of the Muskingum was Charley Williams, known better as "King Charley." He was born in 1764, near Hagerstown, Maryland, and moved in his boyhood to West Virginia, near Wheeling. Upon reaching manhood he settled near what is now Coshocton, in Ohio. He was a trapper, hunter, scout, and trader. He, for a long time was the ruling factor in the frontier life of the surrounding country, and held numerous offices, from road supervisor up to tax-collector and member of the legislature. The ferry and the tavern at the forks was run by him.

Perhaps King Charley's most widely known exploit was the kicking out of the tavern of Louis Phillippe, later the King of France. According to the stories told of the incident, the king complained of the poor accommodations, which he felt were unfit for a king. Williams retorted by pointing out that he had entertained hundreds of sovereigns, all of the people of his country being such. He further suggested rather strongly that, if the service was unsatisfactory, Louis Phillippe could get out of the tavern. As the king withdrew, King Charley hastened his exit with the toe of his boot.—H. J. A.

THE FENCE BUILDERS

By FRANK C. ROBERTSON

Hardy pioneer stock were the Knights, seekers always for the open frontier, fugitives always from railroads and towns and civilization. But they were determined leaders also—which made them bring that fatal flock of sheep into the cattle country

ACROSS the drab flatness of the prairie crawled two thin clouds of dust, one of them caused by three covered wagons each drawn by a four-horse team, the other by a small band of sheep driven by a girl of nineteen on a pony. Occasionally the wagons would be obliged to stop and wait for the herd and every time they stopped old Silas Knight would stand upon the spring seat of the lead wagon beside his wife and survey the landscape with a work-hardened hand shading his gray eyes.

Occasionally there was a conference between Silas and his two sturdy sons, but they were never long in agreeing that the land they hoped to pioneer was not yet in sight. For weeks now the Knight family had been on the road, pushing restlessly beyond the frontier. Other men had traversed the country before them; hunters, traders, trappers, prospectors, soldiers, cowboys, but these pioneers were held in little esteem by the Knights. They had left nothing permanent to mark their passing save a knowledge of the trails and a glamor of romance.

The Knight family were home-builders, men who wrote the message of their passing deep in the soil, and then moved on to pioneer other lands as the frontier was pushed beyond them by the rising tide of civilization.

Two things such people as the Knights always left behind them—the fruits of their heart-breaking toil to be enjoyed by the less venturesome, and a fence. Where no fences stand the country is free, wild, and primitive. Behind the fence is civilization; in front of it adventure. The men who built the first fences were the real builders of the nation, even though the progress that invariably followed their efforts always pushed them on and on to further hardships.

For some time the wagons had been waiting for the slow-moving herd, and finally the girl rode up to her father's wagon. Even her rough clothing and the caked dust on her face could not conceal the remarkable prettiness underneath.

"They just won't go, Pa," she said. "If we don't git a dog purty soon I don't know what we'll do. I can't hardly budge 'em."

"Let 'em graze a bit," her fathered directed "I see a dust cloud comin' in on this other road, an' it may be a mover with a dog that we can buy. Looks like we had t' git one some way."

It turned out that those other "movers" did have a dog, one that was destined to play a large part in the fortunes of the Knight family.

WHEN old man Orcutt decided to "go West" "Ole Wuthless," then dignified by the resounding title of "Colonel Bowie," of which the Bowie part was omitted for the sake of brevity, had been selected from a pack of seven "houn' dawgs" to make the trip. One reason was that he was possessed of extraordinary size and an inordinate amount of ambition. The Orcutts would gladly have taken the whole pack along, but feeding a pack of "hongry" hounds in the generous hills of the Ozarks was one thing, and feeding the same pack on the bleak, overland trail to the little-known but alluring West was another.

It was in the third year of Colonel Bowie's existence that the Orcutts definitely decided to get rid of him. The Orcutts had not yet found land that "just suited" them, and the problem of keeping the family larder supplied had become a serious one. The Colonel's appetite was undiminished, and he rendered no appreciable service in return. From speaking of him by his dignified title the family fell to referring to him as "that no-'count, wuthless houn'," and presently all cognomens save that of "Ole Wuthless" had been abandoned.

"The onliest reason I don't shoot thet thar houn' is because I'm short on bullets, an' we might sight game," declared Old Man Orcutt.

It may be said, incidentally, that it was the fond hope of sighting game, and thereby avoiding hard labor, that had kept the Orcutts poor. The Orcutts had left Missouri with the idea firmly in mind that the country beyond the Rocky Mountains abounded in all sorts of game from buffalo to tree squirrels even as the Promised Land was said to abound with milk and honey.

They had been wandering about in that country now for many weeks, and it was seldom they had found game other than jack-rabbits, which, in the summer time, are notoriously poor fare. It was, therefore, with hungry eyes that they contemplated the property of another "mover" as their trails converged at the forks of two emigrant roads. This man's outfit was much more pretentious than the Orcutts'. His wagons were strongly built; his horses were, as the saying goes, "in good fix," neither sloppy fat nor scrawny poor. And with his outfit he had a small band of sheep, also a few cows and calves.

It was the sheep that held Old Man Orcutt's eye.

"Say, mister, what'll y' take fer one o' them thar muttons?" he inquired, though with little hope that he could meet the price.

Old Man Knight regarded Old Man Orcutt with little favor.

"We ain't figgerin' on sellin' none o' them sheep yet, mister," he replied. Then his eyes lighted on a huge, brown body going through a number of weird contortions on the ground by Orcutt's feet. "Tell yuh what I'll do, stranger," he said, "I'll trade ye a mutton for that dog."

Old Orcutt's eyes began to gleam, though he tried hard to look pained.

"Thet thar dawg is a pet, mister, an' I reckon it 'ud be a powerful wrench fer my whole fambly t' pa't with him," he said mournfully.

"Well, I don't reckon he'd be much value to us anyway, though I thought he might mebbe be able to scare them sheep along some," said Knight, who possessed some bartering ability of his own. He spoke to his team and they started on.

"Wait, stranger," Orcutt called loudly. "If you ain't got nary dawg t' he'p drive them thar sheep I reckon I might swap with ye just t' be neighborly an' fer the sake o' doin' ye a good turn."

"Whoa!" called Knight. "Jerry," he said to the son driving the wagon immediately behind him, "go ketch the fattest mutton in the band fer this man. We've traded for his dog."

The young man left his wagon, spoke to George, his brother, driving the other wagon, and they started for the little herd grazing on a nearby hillside.

"Pa's traded for a dog for yuh, Till," said Jerry, and the girl at once headed for the wagons.

"Where's my dog, Pa?" she asked eagerly, unmindful of the stares of the Orcutt family.

"This is him," said her father a bit doubtfully.

At that moment Ole Wuthless was busily chasing his tail, making a perfectly ridiculous sight with his great bulk and bony frame. As if to acknowledge the introduction the dog desisted from his amusement, sat down and regarded the girl with his great, soft eyes. Something in those eyes appealed to the girl.

"Come here, boy," she called, and Ole Wuthless launched himself with a mighty leap that almost knocked her off her feet.

He fell to licking her hand frantically, then suddenly stopped, tucked his tail, raced furiously around the wagons three or four times, and finally returned to the girl for applause. Tillie's heart was completely won.

Presently the live sheep was safely stowed

away in the Orcutt wagon, and each outfit prepared to start on its way.

"Just a minute. What is this dog's name?" Tillie asked.

Orcutt was in the seat with his whip in his hand, and the mutton was in his wagon. The temptation to let his victims know that the joke was on them proved irresistible. Had the question been asked before he would have answered importantly: "Colonel Bowie, suh." As it was now he chuckled.

"Thet thar dawg takes his name from his habits, so we calls him 'Ole Wuthless'," he exulted.

The Orcutt wagon jolted away, and suddenly the dog ceased his gambols and gazed after it doubtfully. Then his great, mellow eyes sought the girl's eyes wistfully.

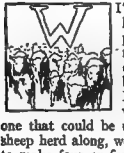
"Let him go, Till," Old Man Knight ordered. "That outfit has just stung us for a mutton, that's all. Migh 'a' knowed better than t' trade with such a trashy lookin' outfit."

"But, Dad, he might be some good," the girl pleaded.

"Just from the way that old walloper spoke I know he ain't worth shootin'," Knight said.

The Orcutt wagon was getting farther and farther away, and the dog turned slowly to follow it. Tillie swung in to her saddle and loped away toward her herd, the tail end of which was now just over a low hill. She had just got out of sight from her father as Old Wuthless overtook the Orcutt wagon. She dared not call or whistle, for Old Man Knight was a man who exacted strict obedience from his children, but she did beckon furiously with her arm when the dog turned about. Instantly he came bounding toward her, giving tremendous barks of joy that sent the terrified sheep into a compact huddle.

And so Ole Wuthless became a member of the Knight family.



WITHIN twenty-four hours the dog had completely lived up to his name. His usefulness could be represented only by a minus sign. The Knights needed a dog very badly. A good dog, one that could be used to hurry the little sheep herd along, would have enabled them to make four or five more miles each day, and time was precious. But Ole Wuthless was an impediment rather than a help. Whenever he could be persuaded to go after the sheep at all he went with tremendous leaps and roars straight into the middle of the band and scattered them to the four winds. After he had been stopped with some difficulty it usually required half an hour or more to get the herd collected again.

At the merest sign of his presence the cows began to bawl and show fight. They could not get it through their bovine minds that he was anything but a dangerous engine of destruction. Even while he was ranging wide and wild on one of his ceaseless hunts for adventure he was a menace to the herder's peace of mind. Occasionally he would jump up a rabbit, a badger, or even a prairie dog, and his resonant *honk! honk!* would come floating back and send the herd into a panic-stricken huddle.

The only time when he was not liable to cause some sort of a ruction was when Tillie could persuade him to stay docilely behind her, but this, with his unlimited ambition, was hard to do. Life to Ole Wuthless was a wondrous thing, and his whole mind was one vast question mark. He wanted to explore every nook and cranny within reach of the trail—and he came very near doing it. He never killed a badger, never caught a prairie dog, and it was seldom indeed that he got a rabbit, but his enthusiasm and optimism never faltered. Some day, he believed, he would bag one of each. And he wondered why people were always so dull and lived their lives in such a monotonous routine.

To get right down to fundamentals, the chief difference between Ole Wuthless and the Knights, aside from the fact that they were people and he was a dog, was one of ancestry. Though he was a mongrel of many breeds there was sporting blood in his veins. Back in the remote dog past his ancestors had belonged to gentlemen of leisure and the various pleasures of the chase had been their sole occupation. Also there was in him an unsuspected strain of fighting blood from bear-battling forefathers. With this blood in him it was only natural that he could not take the sordid things of life seriously. In spite of appearances Ole Wuthless was a dog aristocrat of sorts.

With the Knight family it was different. Reaching far, far back they had been pioneers—and poor. Life for them had been one constant struggle for existence, to "get ahead," as Old Man Knight would have expressed it. Sport was something they knew little of, and only to be indulged in when their time was not better occupied. A life dedicated entirely to sport was something entirely beyond their consideration.

Even at that early date the prairies of Iowa had become too crowded for them, and with their goods and chattels they had set out to

find a place beyond the Rockies where they could "git a foothold first." Old Man Knight knew exactly what he wanted, and he was sure that sooner or later he would find it. That was a place where there were no settlers, yet with abundant range and conditions favorable to farming. If he should find such a place Knight knew that he would have no trouble getting plenty of settlers to come out from his old home, after he and George and Jerry had homesteaded the pick of the land.

They had been on trail now longer than he had figured. It was too late in the season to hope to plant a crop, but he hoped to find some river bottom where there was wild hay to be had for the cutting. With hay for their stock they would have all fall and winter to get ready for the next year; then, if conditions were right, Old Man Knight visioned an ultimate flow of gold into his pockets as a reward for his foresight in bringing stock into a new country to utilize the resources of the country from the first. Incidentally, the West, the real, unromantic, matter-of-fact West of to-day, was founded by men of the caliber of Old Man Knight.

So much does success or failure in life depend upon little things, that the whole Knight enterprise was threatened by a dog, or the lack of one. They had the sheep and it was too late to change their plans. Had not the sheep dog they had brought from Iowa died they would have been many miles farther on their journey, perhaps located. But he had died, and they had not yet found a place to locate. Hot, dry winds were burning up the wild hay, and in a few weeks it would be too late to get their supply for winter. To a farmer feed for his live-stock comes before everything else.

IT WAS little wonder that the Knight family took to blaming Ole Wuthless for the slowness of their progress. Of course there was a measure of injustice in this because the dog had never contracted nor undertaken to drive a single sheep a single foot, but the idea of a dog who would not "work" was reprehensible to their sense of the fitness of things.

"Till," said Old Man Knight one morning, "you drive George's team a while this mornin'. George, you take the pony, the dog—an' the rifle—an' bring the herd along."

An understanding look flashed between father and son, but Tillie intercepted it. She knew that Ole Wuthless was to be left behind. Her eyes filled with tears. The big dog, with his great, laughing eyes had become very dear to her. The girl was a bit different from the other members of the Knight family. Women, under the stern pioneer code, were not the objects of such tender solicitude as they were in a more mature state of civilization.

In planning the future of the Knight family Tillie alone had been forgotten. Her work was to help the others until such time as some desirable man should come along and claim her for a wife. And, since they hoped to find a place as yet completely isolated, that event promised to be a good many years in the future; in the interim no provision whatever had been made for Tillie's happiness.

In the minds of the male members of the family, and also Tillie's mother, this was as it should be. The wilderness was to be tamed; what did personal pleasure amount to compared with this? Yet the girl was mildly rebellious. Not consciously so, yet she looked forward to the coming years with a degree of dread and withdrew more and more from the family councils.

Previous to the arrival of Ole Wuthless her best chum had been Banjo, the little black pony, but even he was the property of Jerry and likely to be taken from her at any time. The dog, worthless as he was, had completely won her heart.

"We don't either one of us count for anything, Wuthless," she told him one day with some bitterness.

The order for the execution of Ole Wuthless had gone through her like a knife-thrust, but she knew better than to oppose her father's commands openly. Old Man Knight she knew, felt that he was showing her all the consideration she deserved by having the dog killed out of her sight. Without a word she walked over to George's wagon and climbed into the seat. The four lines were wrapped around the brake and she picked them up with expert fingers. Jerry was the expert driver, but she was nearly as good as her father or George.

At that moment Ole Wuthless reared up on the left side of the wagon with his feet on the front wheel. He was so tall that his head was nearly even with the top of the wagon box He whined sociably, and a pang of misery went through the girl.

Suddenly she noted that the others were all occupied around the other wagons. Banjo was tied some distance away, and he was not yet saddled. George would take time to let out the stirrups, and it might be many minutes before he would miss the dog.

"Here, Wuthless," she called tensely "Git in here."

The canvas wagon cover had been thrown back of the first bow and it dropped over the roll of bedding behind the spring seat. She held up the end of the canvas as she spoke and indicated to the dog that he was to get under it.

There was a look of good-natured inquiry on the dog's face as to what manner of game this was, but he leaped in with surprising ease.

"Lay down an' keep quiet," she said, more crossly than he had ever heard her speak before.

He did his best to obey. He failed to see the reason for such inactivity, but he always did his best to obey the girl. Doubtless this was some new game, and the reason would soon be made clear.

The two wagons ahead jolted forward, and George started toward the pony, carrying his rifle. Tillie spoke to her horses and they tightened into the harness. At that moment Ole Wuthless's great head came out of the canvas, and his soft, red tongue licked the girl's neck. With all his faults the dog had learned to love the girl with a great and absorbing love. In his eyes she was the most marvelous thing that had ever existed—especially when she joined him in one of his rollicking games, as she frequently did when they were out of sight of the wagons ahead.

A cold fear lest George should turn his head and see the dog gripped Tillie.

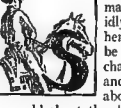
"Lay down," she hissed vehemently, and the head of Ole Wuthless disappeared under the canvas as if it had been pulled back by a spring.

The next two hours were filled with anxiety for Tillie. It began when, a half hour after they had left the camp-ground, George overtook her, demanding to know what had become of Wuthless.

"I can't see him," she replied dully. She could hear him however, and her blood was beating fast lest George should also.

He rode on, however, and overtook the other wagons. He was scowling as he returned, but he made no further inquiries at the time. Her problem was by no means over, however. Each minute was filled with consuming dread lest Ole Wuthless betray his presence. She could not keep him from wriggling his head out from under the canvas, and she knew that the first time he sighted a rabbit, or a badger he would emit one of his thunderous whoops and go after it full tilt. In that event he was doomed. At the very best she could hope to prolong his life for but a few hours; her ruse would be discovered when they stopped at noon.

Nevertheless she manœuvered her team as best she could. The wagons ahead were compelled to travel slowly, for they could not get too far ahead of the sheep, and frequently they stopped to rest. Tillie kept as far behind them as she dared without getting too close to George who brought up the rear with the herd. When they stopped she stopped. When they went on she went on. And under the hot canvas Ole Wuthless wriggled restlessly.



SUDDENLY she heard a man on horseback rapidly overtaking her, and her heart sank. It would be George coming to change places with her, and she knew enough about him to know that he would shoot the dog without ceremony. He had even less sentiment than his father. Because of her great pity for the dog she did not turn her head until the horseman was abreast of her. Then she looked up defiantly, and a wave of color glowed over her face as she met the curious gaze of a stranger.

He had been intending to trot past, but at the unexpected sight of a girl he pulled his horse to a walk equal to the pace of the work-horses. His hat came off and the girl saw a tanned face, a laughing mouth, and a pair of good-humored eyes. There was a network of small wrinkles about the eyes that might have told the girl that those eyes could become hard and defiant upon occasion had she been in the habit of reading faces. About the mouth, too, were written daredeviltry and determination.

"Howdy, 'miss," he said boldly. "I'm shore glad t' meet yuh."

Tillie inclined her head bashfully.

"Why—why——" she faltered.

"Because it's just like findin' a rosebush in a desert of cactus," he laughed.

Again Tillie blushed, but she was pleased. She stole another glance at the stranger, and it seemed to her that he was the handsomest man she had ever seen. Not even Jerry could sit a horse with such indolent grace.

Then Ole Wuthless stuck his head out and gave a curious *woof*!

"Lord, ma'am," the stranger exclaimed, "why didn't yuh tell me yuh carried a bloodhound for yore protection. It ain't right t' scare a poor, innocent traveler thataway."

She noticed that there was no trace of fear on his handsome face.

"Mister," she said with a pleading earnestness, "don't you want a dog?"

"What! Me want a dog?" He gazed smilingly at Ole Wuthless, who had now wiggled completely out of the canvas and was inspecting the stranger with great curiosity. "Well," he added after a moment, "if he's a right good cattle dog I might take him off yore hands."

"Oh, he ain't no good for nothin'," Tillie said truthfully. Then she saw the man laughing, and knew that he had sized Ole Wuthless up correctly in the first place. "He—he's just a pet," she added lamely.

"Well," he said, "I hope I'm too much of a gentleman to take a lady's pet away from her."

She saw that he was not in the least interested in the dog, but he was in no hurry to ride on. She saw admiration in his eyes, but she was determined to save the life of her dog if such a thing was possible, and this seemed the only chance.

"Won't you please take this dog?" she begged. "They'd have killed him this mornin' if I hadn't hid him, but they're sure to find him at noon, an' —an'—— Her voice broke.

The stranger's face suddenly grew serious. "Why, little girl," he said, "I ain't got the least use in the world for a houn' dog, but if he means that much to yuh, an' yuh want me t' take him, I reckon I can."

"You don't know how much it would oblige me, stranger. Ole Wuthless has got such a happy disposition, an' he's so friendly that I just can't bear to think of 'em shootin' him," she cried.

"That's quite a name," said the stranger, "an' I reckon there'll be two of us if I take him." An undernote of sadness had crept into his voice, but the girl was too excited to notice.

"You'll be good to him, won't you, mister? You'll keep him, an' not let people abuse him, won't you?" she begged.

"I'll do just that," he said, "if yuh'll promise me somethin' in return. That is if some poor devil ever comes to yuh for help that yuh'll do him a good turn even if you know he ain't just what he ought to be. Maybe he'll even be an outlaw, but yuh just figger that there may be some good in him the same as there is in Ole Wuthless here. He just mebbe don't sabbe other people's way of lookin' at things."

"Of course," Tillie promised readily.

She had scarcely a conception of what he was saying. Her arms were about the shaggy neck of Ole Wuthless, and she was bidding him good-by with a poignant grief. She was going to miss the affectionate, playful old hound, and his joyous *honk* during the tedious, wearisome hours on trail.

"If you'll just put your rope around his neck and leave the road with him, they'll never know what become of him," she urged.

The stranger was quick to take a hint. Even if the male members of the girl's family would be glad to get rid of the dog so easily they would scold the girl for what she had done that morning. He dismounted and the girl stopped her team. For a few minutes they would be out of sight of both the wagons and the herd, and there was a crooked coulee up which the stranger could disappear. It required but a moment to get the rope around Ole Wuthless' neck, but it required a strenuous effort to get him to follow.

"I'll never forgit your kindness," Tillie vowed.

"Would yuh mind givin' me yore name, an' the place yuh're goin' to?" he inquired. "Then," he added mischievously, "if yuh want yore little pet back again, mebbe I can hand him over some day."

"Pa aims to locate somewhere along Raft River if he can find a place that ain't too crowded," Tillie said. "But I——"

She stopped and for some unaccountable reason blushed. Later she was often to wonder why she had not completed her sentence and told him frankly that there was no use for him to come, that she would never be permitted to have her dog.

"Well, good-by," the stranger said, but he delayed his departure a moment while a look of hesitation came over his face. "See here, sister," he continued, slightly apologetic, "it's none of my business, but yuh could be doin' a service t' yore people if yuh could persuade 'em not to go into the Raft River country with those da—er—sheep."

"Pa's set in his ways. I couldn't do anything with him," Tillie said with a sigh.

"Well, then, good-by, an' good luck," he said.

Tillie sat with the lines held loosely in her hands until he had disappeared around a bend in the coulee. Ole Wuthless went along protestingly, making frantic unavailing efforts to get free from the rope, but the other end was around the saddle horn and he had to go perforce. When they were out of sight the girl wiped a tear from the corner of her eye and stifled the rest. She was from a hard-bitten race to whom tears were a sign of weakness, so she drove on dry-eyed. But memory was active, and, strangely enough, in after days the memory of the dog's new owner was as vividly in her mind as was that of the dog.

The disappearance of Ole Wuthless was a

cause of mild wonder to the rest of the Knight family until Jerry explained it to their satisfaction.

"He jest got t' chasin' a rabbit an' didn't have sense enough t' come back."

OTHER things of far greater import soon claimed their attention. They had now entered the wonderful Raft River valley. The hills were black with thousands of cattle, a number of big cattle outfits from the Southwest having entered the country several years before. There was a tough little cow town at the lower end of the valley, but Old Man Knight, being a religious man, did not tarry long. The official designation of the place was Raft River, but the name in common use was "Cantgitum," so called on account of the well known fact that it was a city of refuge to all the crooks and tinhorns in the country.

Above the town were a few scattered ranches, in reality little but the headquarters for various cattle outfits. There were miles of open meadow with the tall grass waving gracefully in the breeze, ready to be made into hay by any one brave enough to face the millions of green head flies that had driven the cattle to the highlands some weeks before.

Many times straight young riders met the Knight caravan, at first with mildly curious smiles, but every face became frozen into rigid lines at sight of the little herd of sheep. They rode on without speaking.

Tillie was the only member of the Knight family that took the slightest notice of this phenomenon—and she would not have noticed except for the strange warning which she had received from the man who had helped her save Ole Wuthless' life. Once she ventured to call the matter to the attention of her father, but she was repulsed with a snort.

"What business is it o' theirs?" he demanded indignantly. "We ain't a-goin' t' bother them any, an' if we want t' run sheep that's our affair."

The Knights were a single-minded breed, capable of tremendous effort and sacrifice to attain a completion of the vision that dominated their thoughts. They and their ancestors had pioneered along the northern boundary of the nation, building homes and establishing farming communities that were later to grow into cities and towns.

Their vision was large, and yet it was limited. A transplanted Iowa was in reality what they hoped to see. They were congenitally incapable of getting the viewpoint of these lean men from the Southwest who loved freedom and the wide, open distances above all else, and to whom the cattle business spelled all things: Romance, Adventure, Life!

Every rider sensed that these settlers, like the Knights, who came with their wagons piled high with farming machinery, were a menace to their future, but they were inclined to tolerate them—unless they came with sheep. Sheep, they had the foresight to see, would inevitably drive the cattle from the range. Ingrained in their very being was a fierce scorn for any one who would raise sheep in preference to cattle.

It was inevitable that there should be a protest lodged against the invasion of the Knights before they had penetrated far into the country. The man who took this burden upon himself was one Alick Peters, a cattleman who hoped to become the dominating figure in the country. He rode up to the camp of the Knights one evening and surveyed them arrogantly.

"Git off an' rest your saddle, stranger. Supper'll be ready directly," old Knight greeted hospitably.

Peters paid no attention to the invitation.

"Figger on locatin' here?" he demanded.

"Thinkin' some of it," old man Knight replied.

"Purty crowded here—for sheepmen." The inflection on the last two words was unmistakable, even to Old Man Knight.

"Is that a threat that we can't stop here?" Knight inquired steadily.

"I guess it amounts to about that unless you leave them sheep behind," Peters said uncompromisingly.

"I reckon there's plenty of room here, even for sheep," Knight said just as firmly.

"I'm givin' yuh fair warnin'," Peters said grimly.

"See here, mister," George Knight spoke up, "there's grass here up to yore knees whichever way yuh look. All the grass this little bunch of sheep eat wouldn't hurt nobody."

"That's right," Peters admitted. "Yore little bunch wouldn't hurt nobody, but if you make money on 'em you'll tell yore friends about it, won't yuh?" He paused for a moment, and as there was no denial he went on. "That's the point. Once sheep git a foothold in a country there's no stoppin' 'em till they clean out the whole range. We aim t' see they don't git a foothold."

"I guess this is a free country," Old Man Knight declared.

"Sheep an' cattle can't live together—an' the cattle were here first," Peters retorted. "If the law won't protect us we'll protect ourselves."

"An' the same goes double," Knight shot back.

Peters rode away, but he left behind him a badly worried pioneer family.

"We don't want t' have trouble, Pa. Let's pull out," Mrs. Knight begged.

"I say let's sell the sheep an' go into cattle," young Jerry suggested. "It'll be lots more fun."

"We're not lookin' for fun." Old Man Knight said sternly. "Stands t' reason that runnin' cattle loose on a fertile country like this can't last. Sooner or later it's all goin' t' be farmed, an' the big money is for the man that can look ahead. There's more money in sheep than there is in cattle, an' I'm not goin' t' be buffaloed out o' my rights."

"That's the stand, Pa," George indorsed heartily.

KNIGHT ordered camp made where they were. For a week the male members "looked round" for a future home. It was not hard to find land of a desirable quality anywhere along the river bottom, but Old Man Knight was determined to find a place where they could not be easily surrounded, and where they would always have access to the range. It was a grinning cowboy, who seemed more friendly than usual, who directed him to the very place he had been seeking.

Coming into Raft River from the west was a swift, turbulent stream known as Beaverdam. For five miles the creek ran through a narrow gorge with steep, rocky slopes, the bottom covered with a dense growth of brush. At the upper end of the gorge was an immense, petrified beaver dam from which the creek took its name. There it suddenly opened up into a beautiful little valley three or four miles long and a mile wide. Above, and on the sides, the hills rose precipitously, in places covered with red fir and smaller timber.

"Right here's where we locate, boys," Old Man Knight told his two sons. "There's good land, there's water, there's wood, there's range, there's house logs within half a mile, an' the valley ain't so big but what we can pick out land in a way t' command everything an' still leave room for some neighbors."

George grunted approval.

"An' we'll be where we won't be botherin' them fool cowmen," he said, pointing out that the hills thereabouts were free from cattle.

"If I ain't greatly mistaken there'll be a railroad runnin' down this canyon some day, an' if there's a town built it'll be on our land," the old man said with keen satisfaction, completely forgetful of the fact that it was the coming of towns and railroads that had caused him to forsake his former home.

In only one respect were they the least disappointed. They had hoped to find a completely virgin land, but they were quick to grasp that even in that early day there were few places worth having where the cowmen had not penetrated. They knew that they might travel far and not find so good a place as this. The season was getting along, also, and if they were to get up the winter's hay they would have to begin. Fortunately the winters were mild, and they were told that they would not need much hay.

The place in which they had chosen to locate was called Beaverdam Basin rather than valley, and presently it was a hive of activity. Roads had to be repaired, house logs cut, and the hay put up. For a few weeks Knight was able to hire a pair of hoboes whom he had been able to pick up in Cantgitum. A single month saw a wonderful transformation in the basin wrought by the brawn and skill of the Knights.

Those were easy but not exactly pleasant days for Tillie. Her job, of course, was to look after the sheep and the milk cows. So dank was the growth of grass in the basin that the stock needed little care. Time hung heavy for the lonely girl. She spent hours in exploration on the little Banjo pony, much to the disgust of her parents, who were of the opinion that she should be doing something useful with her spare time. Many times she thought if only she had the great, worthless hound to bear her company life would not be half so bad. Then her thoughts usually centered upon the man who had taken Old Wuthless away.

A peculiar fact, an ominous one had they only known it, was that they never saw any range cattle near the basin. A wandering cowpuncher occasionally drifted by with averted eyes, a mute protest against the sheep. To the girl at least the complete isolation was bitter.

It developed a little later that the life was palling upon another member of the family. Jerry bought a horse and saddle, and presented Banjo to Tillie for her very own. A foolish expenditure of money, his parents and brother viewed it. Jerry's next venture was a trip to Cantgitum one evening. The town was twenty miles away, and he did not put

in an appearance until eleven o'clock the next morning. His eyes were suspiciously bloodshot.

That was the first of many subsequent trips. The wild life of the tough little town was entirely strange to the young Iowa farmer—and remarkably attractive after the weeks of loneliness. In town men seemed to accept his society without question. He knew that he was regarded as a tenderfoot, but even some of the cowboys went out of the way to be friendly. Whether or not they recognized him as being one of the hated men who had introduced sheep into the country he could not find out.

Really Jerry's little celebrations were harmless, but they did not coincide with the grim Knight code of utility and uprightness. It was not long until there was a growing tension between him and the other male members of the family. For this reason it was to Tillie rather than his father that Jerry carried the news of a discovery he had made.

"Do yuh know why we ain't seen no cattle around here?" he asked her one day.

"I s'pose it's because they've decided to leave us alone," she said apathetically.

"It's not that at all," Jerry denied. "There ain't been no cattle around this basin for two years before we got here. It's because they're afraid to."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of 'Butch' Hopper's gang of outlaws."

"What about 'em?" Tillie demanded eagerly. She was interested at last.

"They hang out in these mountains west of here, an' along some creeks an' valleys on the other slope of the divide. Every now an' then they swoop down in the Raft River country an' make a haul of some kind, an' when they do they always travel by way of Beaverdam. There don't seem t' be much law an' no cattlemen wants to take a chance on runnin' his stock right under their noses."

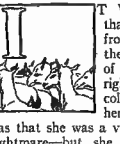
"I'd like to see those outlaws once," Tillie exclaimed excitedly.

"Gosh, I don't," Jerry declared. "That's what I'm scared of—that we will see 'em. If Pa an' Goerge didn't know so much I'd tell 'em that we'd better look out. I've learned that them cattlemen that wanted t' keep us out of the country are tickled at the joke we played on ourselves by movin' in here. They're makin' bets down in Cantgitum that Butch Hopper will run us out before snow flies."

"What are they liable to do to us?" Tillie asked, now genuinely alarmed.

Jerry had heard more intimations of what the outlaw gang might do than he cared to tell his sister.

"I don't know," he said vaguely, "but yuh'd better make it a point t' stay out of sight whenever there's strange men around."



IT WAS the next night that Tillie was awakened from a sound sleep by the ringing *honk! honk!* of a dog. She sat upright with a jerk, and a cold feeling swept over her. Her first thought was that she was a victim of a dream or a nightmare—but she could still hear the barking, though it was fading rapidly away in the distance. She was aware that she had heard the sheep milling excitedly, and then her last doubt disappeared as she heard her father calling to the boys. Wrapping up in a blanket, she went to the window and watched the men moving about outside with lanterns.

The sheep were soon quieted, and the men returned to the cabin. Tillie could hear them discussing the matter wonderingly.

"It couldn't 'a' been no wolf nor coyote 'cause it didn't sound like 'em," Old Man Knight was saying.

"But it couldn't 'a' been a dog for why would a dog be out here?" George demanded.

"Wait for mornin' an' I reckon yuh'll find plenty of tracks that'll tell the story," Jerry put in laconically. "I'm tellin' yuh now that this is right on Butch Hopper's outlaw trail, an' him an' his gang are likely goin' through on some devilment or other."

Jerry's idea was scoffed at. Neither Knight nor George had mingled enough with people to hear anything about such people as Hopper's gang. No matter how crude conditions had been where they had pioneered previously there had always been a wholesome respect for law and order, and they were not yet conscious of the fact that they had entered a land where the arm of the law was as yet weak and faltering.

Jerry went to bed in a sulk.

Tillie lay in her bed in a state of the keenest excitement. No matter how much the others chose to speculate upon the matter, she knew positively that she had recognized the bark. The dog that had passed in the night was no other than Ole Wuthless. But the thing that excited her far more than this unexpected reappearance of her old pet was the chain of thought that resulted from the

coupling of this fact with what Jerry had said concerning the Butch Hopper gang.

Was it possible then, she wondered, that her mysterious stranger, around whom she unconsciously had thrown a glamor of romance, was a member of Butch Hopper's outlaw gang? Might he not even be, she thought with a thrill, Butch Hopper himself?

Later on, of course, this romantic mood of Tillie's was bound to give way before the stern code she had imbibed from her parents: no mercy or consideration should be shown any one who deliberately breaks the law. But she did wish he would redeem his promise to hand over the dog if she ever decided she wanted him.

The next morning Jerry enjoyed a measure of satisfaction when the tracks of a small bunch of cattle were discovered going up the creek. There were also tracks of three horses, and the great, splay-footed tracks of a dog. For once Old Man Knight was impressed, and that afternoon found him in Cantgitum seeking an officer. Here for the first time he began to get an inkling of the feeble power of the law.

The county was larger than many of the states, and the county seat was over a hundred miles away. The sole representative of the law in Cantgitum was a deputy sheriff and the town marshal. Knight's efforts to find the deputy sheriff were unavailing, and the town marshal told him frankly that his information was useless and unwelcome. Bartlett, the marshal, bit off a fresh chew of tobacco and volunteered further advice.

"It's thisaway, friend," he said, "Everybody knows that Butch an' his gang pull off a certain percent of their jobs in this country, but who's in the gang, an' just where they hang out nobody knows. It's all any man's life is worth to start warrin' against 'em, so most of us feel that it's cheaper to let 'em make a raid now an' then than it is to fight 'em. Of course now an' then somebody is liable to go on the war-path ag'in 'em; an' for that reason they ain't likely to want anybody planted along their usual trails. For just that reason, friend, I figger you'd be makin' a wise move if yuh pulled clear out of Beaverdam Basin. An' havin' them sheep I'd advise yuh t' keep on goin' till yuh got clear out of the Raft River country."

"You mean to say that you think them outlaws will try to run me away from my home, and the law will give me no protection?" Old Man Knight demanded.

"If the outlaws don't, the cattlemen will," the marshall stated decisively as he strolled away with his hands in his pockets.

OLD MAN KNIGHT stood looking after the officer until he disappeared into a saloon. Finally Knight went into a saloon himself. It was the first time he had entered such a place since he was a very young man. He did not drink, and he was oblivious to the curious or challenging stares that greeted him. After a few minutes they ceased to pay attention to him and went on with the usual activities. Later on Knight visited every other saloon and every business house in the town. When he left town late that evening he had two new rifles and a supply of ammunition.

"I've allus been a God-fearin', law-abidin' man," he told his family the next morning, "but right here now there don't seem t' be no law of God or man. It'll come when we git a better class o' people out here than these Westerners. I'm goin' t' write to all the people back home that wants t' come West, tellin' 'em t' come out first thing in the spring. But in the meantime we got to enforce our own law."

"These people wouldn't be so hard to git along with if we didn't have sheep," Jerry said unwisely.

They were at breakfast. Old Man Knight paused with half a hot cake half way to his mouth.

"They're no good," he snorted angrily. "An' furthermore," he went on, "I don't want any son of mine associatin' with 'em. After this I want you to stay away from that God-forsaken town down there."

"An' I say I'll go where I want to an' when I want to," Jerry retorted hotly.

"Yo're not twenty-one yet," his father snapped.

It was a fact that Jerry still lacked a few months of being of legal age, a circumstance that had been a little embarrassing to them because he had not been able to file on his land when his father and George did. It had been arranged for him to claim ownership on certain land by squatting between the places held by the other two, in the hope that no one would take the trouble to look up the records until he became of age.

"If I was you I wouldn't be sayin' much about my age," he retorted angrily.

Old Man Knight flushed. Even this form of deception had been repugnant to him, but he did want to get a strangle-hold on the Beaverdam Basin. For that reason it hurt him more to be reminded of it. "You'll take my orders yet, or you'll git out," he bellowed angrily.

An hour later Jerry mounted his horse and rode away. None of the Knight family, with the exception of Tillie took his departure seriously. She hung on his arm and cried a bit. Jerry had always been her favorite, and it seemed to her that the loneliness would be unbearable if he were gone.

"It's no use askin' me to stay, Till," he declared. "I'm through with these old stick-in-the-mud ideas. This is too big a country for a man to be just a mere farmer in. Out here there's room for a feller to git around. Pa an' George's ideas don't fit this country. It's a cattle range country, so why try t' make anything else out of it. I'm goin' t' be a cowboy."

"You'll come back an' see me, won't you?" the girl wept.

"Sure I will, but it'll be after I'm of age."

He rode away in the proud confidence of youth, and his father, watching him with the conceit and arrogance of middle age, felt sure that necessity would surely bring him back.

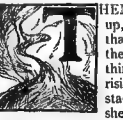
The next Sunday Tillie had left her little herd to climb to the top of a pinnacle from which she loved to survey the surrounding country. She had tied Banjo in a clump of aspens at the foot of the hill and gone to the top afoot. The afternoon sun was warm, and she was half dozing when she saw two men ride into the Basin from the upper end. Instantly she sat up, taking an alert interest in the men. They had come down what she had learned to call "the outlaw trail," and, though she would not admit it even to herself, she was always looking for a man to ride down that trail with a dog.

She was quickly convinced that these men had no dog. Their actions, also, were a bit peculiar. Though she did not grasp it at the time, they were keeping certain obstacles between themselves and the buildings by the beaver dam. They passed close by the sheep, stopped and looked at them a moment and rode on. Presently they reached the stack-yard containing the three long, low stacks of hay that had been so laboriously put up by the Knight family. She saw them dismount, tie their horses to the pole fence, and go inside.

What their business could be there she could not imagine. They went around on the opposite side of the stack from her and were there perhaps five minutes. Then they remounted their horses and rode back toward the sheep. Once more they stopped by the herd. The busily grazing ewes eyed the riders indifferently for a moment. Then, suddenly, their heads went up, and they raced into a compact huddle. Tillie saw two ewes fall sprawling even before the report of the revolver shots reached her. Then a dozen staccato explosions assailed her ears as she watched the helpless, unprotected ewes mill and climb upon each other's backs in aimless confusion.

The wildly excited girl on the pinnacle fully expected to see every sheep killed before her eyes, but it was characteristic of her hardy breed that she ran rapidly down the hill with the intention of doing what she could to protect them. Long before she reached Banjo, however, the men were riding away. Evidently they had been satisfied merely to empty their revolvers as a warning.

When Tillie reached the still terrified herd she found that half a dozen had been killed, and as many more were wounded so that they would in all probability have to be killed. The two sheep-killers had disappeared over a low ridge, their intention obviously being to go back the way they had come. For a moment Tillie gazed helplessly at the dead sheep; then she started to head the herd toward home.



THEN, chancing to glance up, she saw something that caused her to forget the herd instantly. A thin coil of smoke was rising above the hay-stacks. A moment later she saw two more curls creeping upward and knew that all three stacks had been fired. Lying low on Banjo's neck, Tillie surprised the little black horse by vigorously applying the quirt. In a moment they were racing madly homeward, entirely forgetful of the treacherous badger holes that lay in their path.

At the house Tillie flung herself to the ground and called out shrilly that the stacks were on fire. Fortunately both Knight and George were at home. In short order they were on horses and racing toward the stacks with their arms full of sacks. It was but a matter of minutes until Tillie and her mother had a team hitched to a wagon. Then Tillie drove swiftly to the creek. Every available utensil that could be used to haul water was utilized, and, as fast as Mrs. Knight could fill the buckets from the creek, Tillie emptied them into the tubs and boilers and kegs. When they were filled Mrs. Knight spread soaking quilts over them, to prevent much of the slopping and to utilize every drop of water that was possible.

They reached the stacks with a number of water-soaked quilts and enough water to soak them again a few times. The two men

were battling valiantly with the flames with their dry sacks, but making no headway. The hay had been cut too dry, and now it burned like shavings. The wet quilts and sacks helped some, and Mrs. Knight threw herself into the fray with all the valor and vigor of a pioneer woman, while Tillie drove at a run back to the creek for more water.

But when the battle was finally over all that remained to them was less than half of one stack. From this they had been able to beat back the flames while the men took turns with a pitchfork until the stack was cut in two by a small tunnel. A slight change in the wind was all that enabled them to do even this much.

The sun sank in red splendor behind the western hills as they finished their fight and surveyed the heaps of glowing ashes that had caused them so much toil and anxiety. Old Man Knight looked into the smoke-blackened faces of his wife and children, and his stern features set in grimmer lines.

"Somebody started this fire," he said.

It was not until then that Tillie had a chance to tell what she had seen. As she told of the sheep that had been shot down Mrs. Knight and George broke into exclamations of rage, but Knight was silent for a time.

"Go bring yore sheep in," he said to Tillie finally.

"This has ruined us, Silas, but never you mind, we'll make it yet," his wife spoke up comfortingly, the same words in spirit as were spoken countless thousands of times by other dauntless pioneer women of America.

Slowly Knight's arm went around his wife's waist. They were undemonstrative people—long hours of bitter toil left them no time for that—but in hours of supreme trial and crisis they knew they could depend upon each other down to the last ounce of energy.

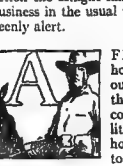
"They can't beat us, Jane," Silas Knight said grimly. "We come here to pioneer this country, an' all the outlaws this side o' hell can't stop us."

Still in the fighting mood caused by their battle against the fire, the others echoed his words, but in the morning, or perhaps during the long, sleepless hours of the night the reaction was bound to set in and things looked gloomy indeed. All their hopes of future prosperity practically depended upon getting their live-stock through the first winter, and without hay it seemed impossible. Not only this, but they rightly interpreted the wanton killing of the sheep as a warning that worse things would follow unless they left Beaver-dam Basin.

They knew enough of the country by this time to know that they would not be able to buy hay for sheep. It was too late in the season to think of getting back to the old home, and there was no market.

"We've got t' tough it out someway," Old Man Knight declared the next day. "We've got a little hay left, an' there's still a little dry slough grass that we may be able t' cut. It may be a light winter. Anyway, we won't give up till we have to. George an' me will carry our rifles, an' you, Till, never let the herd out of sight. Always keep close around here as yuh can."

Having determined upon their course of action the Knight family went on about its business in the usual way, talking little, but keenly alert.



A FEW days later six horsemen rode down the outlaw trail. Tillie was the first to see them coming, and, giving her little herd a start toward home, she raced ahead to tell her father and brother.

"You women folks stay in the house while we see what's up," Knight ordered.

With their rifles in hand they advanced a few rods to meet the men who were now coming openly toward the cabin. The men were smiling as they rode up, sneering, contemptuous smiles.

"Well, sheep-herders, how's business?" remarked a dark, heavy-set man in his late forties.

"Is my business any affair of yours?" Old Man Knight demanded. The very manner of these men spelled hostility, and Knight was not a man to beat about the bush.

"Well, it might be at that," the man retorted.

From the looks of the others it was plain that he was the leader, a man whom they feared and respected.

"How do yuh figger?" George Knight put in angrily.

"Fer one thing I don't like the idee of you fellers puttin' up your buildin's right here at the mouth o' this canyon. We have t' drive cattle up this way, an' it's practically impossible t' drive wild cattle past these buildin's. As far as that goes, we plumb object to yuh bein' in this basin at all. Yo're spoilin' our range."

"Why drive cattle past here at all?" Knight demanded.

"It's our best trail, an' we don't aim t' be interfered with," the man snapped.

"Is yore name Hopper?" Knight demanded suddenly.

The five men looked at their leader expectantly, and in their looks Knight had an answer to his question. Yet for a moment the leader hesitated.

"Yes, my name's Butch Hopper, an' I'm a bad man t' monkey with," he finally admitted angrily.

"I've heard you an' yore gang were notorious thieves," Knight said calmly. "But the time is comin' in this country when you an' yore stripe can't brag openly of bein' desperadoes an' bad-men."

"Be a little careful what names you call us, old man," Hopper said angrily.

"I didn't lie, did I?" Knight demanded. "Cattle-stealin' an' stage-robbin' is yore business, ain't it?"

"Look here, old man," Hopper shot out in a low, tense voice, "when you speak of my occupation you call me a cattle buyer, do yuh understand? An' you do it a heap respectful." The outlaw's right hand hovered above his gun, and his baleful glance was meant to be intimidating.

Old Man Knight stood his ground manfully.

"I've heard that you're a criminal an' I believe it," he said steadily. "I'm sure it was you or yore men who burned my haystacks an' shot my sheep, but yuh can't scare me. I've established my home here, an' I aim t' stick."

"You're a fool," Hopper snapped. "I could wipe you an' yore whole tribe out of existence an' never leave a trace."

Before Knight could speak he felt Tillie's hand on his arm.

"The two men who set fire to the stacks are here," she said. "There, and there."

She pointed out two of the men, and they flushed beneath the glance that Butch Hopper gave them. They had been instructed to avoid being seen, and now their leader knew that they had bungled.

"They're no more guilty than this man Hopper," Knight said. "You, Till, git back in the house."

The girl retreated slowly, but the gaze of Butch Hopper's men was on her with such a light that she seemed to feel it. Half way to the house she turned for an instant, and a blush overspread her face as she saw the unclean glances of the outlaws directed at her.

"Old man, this is no place t' try t' bring up a girl like that," Butch Hopper said. "Yuh'd better take yore family an' pull out."

"Now you listen to me," Silas Knight said firmly. "This is my land, held under a legal right from the guv'ment. I order you to leave my land an' never come back. Furthermore, I'm goin' t' build a fence right square across the canyon here, an' I want this t' be the last time I see you or any of yore gang here."

The eyes of Butch Hopper narrowed ominously, and his itching fingers all but closed on the handle of his gun. He was a man not used to being defied. Powerful enough to make the officers of the law supine before him, it was a blow to his pride that two hated "nesters" should hurl defiance into his teeth. At a sign from him the two men could be shot down before they could bring their cumbersome rifles to their shoulders. He was angry enough to want to see them killed—and yet he made no sign.

There was something about that dauntless attitude of Old Man Knight that commanded his unwilling respect. It was, though he did not recognize it, an embodiment of the pioneer spirit that knows that it is destined to conquer in the end, regardless of who falls in the struggle.

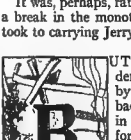
Yet Butch was by no means minded to accept defeat. He carried on his operations on a big scale, and this was but a petty annoyance. He knew, however, that it would not do to give in at all, for, once it became known that Butch Hopper had been backed down by a nester, it would be the beginning of his downfall. Also, it was really necessary to his business that Beaverdam Basin remain open range.

"I reckon yo're hot under the collar right now, friend," he said, "so we'll give yuh time to think it over. But I calculate if yuh want t' keep yore health we'll find yuh missin' the next time we come along here—an' that ain't a goin' t' be long in the future."

Hopper reined his horse sharply, and the outlaws rode on down the creek.

"If we can hold out till spring we'll be all right," Old Man Knight declared, and the idea of giving up the fight did not enter the minds of any of them.

It was, perhaps, rather relished by Tillie as a break in the monotony of existence. She took to carrying Jerry's old rifle.



BUTCH HOPPER evidently had other trails by which he could get back to his hiding-places in the mountains behind, for he did not return by way of Beaverdam. A few days later a solid stake-and-rider fence was thrown across the canyon just below the old beaver dam. A pair of bars had to be left in the fence since down the canyon was the only way for the

Knights to get outside, but these were placed so that they entered a long corral, and whoever used them would have to pass directly in front of the house.

Of course it was possible to tear out a panel of the fence, but that would take time, and it would cause noise. Silas and George were reasonably sure that they would hear any one who attempted to tamper with the fence, and they were fully prepared and determined to see that that person did not pass without their consent.

By all the laws of reason the cattlemen along Raft River should have been grateful to any one with the courage to oppose Butch Hopper, but their sympathy was all the other way. Hopper was a known menace, and to some extent they could calculate on the amount of damage he would do them. Knight as a nester was something they instinctively hated, and as the owner of sheep he represented a force that they felt would ultimately spell disaster to the cattle business unless he, and all other men who wanted to run sheep, were crushed at the beginning. The news of the trouble at Beaverdam quickly reached Cantgitum, and the people there lived in hourly expectancy of seeing the Knight family "pulling their freight."

One day while Tillie was herding her little band along a small stream that emptied into Beaverdam Creek she was startled by the well remembered *honk!* of a dog. Apparently the herd recognized it also for they shot centerward wildly until the little ground they covered appeared a solid mass of dingy white. A minute later a frightened rabbit shot past, and a few rods behind came Ole Wuthless, baying at the top of his voice, his eyes gleaming joyously.

Tillie noticed instantly that her old pet was slick and well-fed, and the fear that he might be abused was forever gone. Then it occurred to her that the dog's new master might be close at hand, and she looked about excitedly for a hiding-place. Two large willow bushes, were all that offered but she seized Banjo's bridle reins and dragged him between them and crouched down beneath his neck. For several minutes she waited breathlessly, and then she saw Ole Wuthless circling back far below, having given up this particular rabbit as a bad job. The girl knew then that the man had passed on, but strangely enough she did not feel the relief she had expected. Instead, she leaped on Banjo and started in pursuit.

It had suddenly occurred to her that the stranger was riding straight into danger. If he continued he would have to go through the fence below the house, and her father and George were in a mood for trouble. Since the night she had heard Ole Wuthless go by the girl had had no doubt that this man was an outlaw, but she did not want the first clash over the fence to be between him and her family.

She overtook him close beside the stackyard. Nothing remained there now but the fence and the heaps of ashes. The men folks had hauled the remainder of the hay down near the house immediately after the fire. As he heard the beat of her pony's hoofs he stopped his own horse and waited.

Just before she reached the man, Ole Wuthless recognized her and the pony. With a thunderous whoop of welcome he launched himself toward them. Nothing could scare Banjo; he stood his ground as the great bulk of the dog came against his side as Ole Wuthless made a mighty effort to leap high enough to lick Tillie's face. She caught the dog with her arm and managed to hold him just enough to get him off his balance, and he landed on his side with a pained grunt. In a moment he was up again, ready to renew his efforts.

The stranger raised his hat and laughed. Tillie found herself looking into the same half melancholy, half puzzling eyes that she had dreamed of so often.

"Well, if it ain't my friend of the covered wagon," he greeted. "How's everything with yuh?"

"All right," she said hurriedly; "only you mustn't go on down this way."

"Seein' that we're sort of acquaintances, won't yuh shake hands?" he smiled. "We can talk about things later."

Somewhat hesitatingly she accepted his hand, and thrilled at the warm, firm clasp he gave her.

"I see you've taken good care of Ole Wuthless," she remarked. "I hope he ain't been too much bother."

"No bother at all," he disclaimed immediately. "I kinda like the old cuss, but some of the other boys——" He paused and a frown crossed his face.

"The other boys?" Tillie took up the opening promptly. "What do they do, an' why don't they like Ole Wuthless?"

"Well, as you ought to know, he ain't no cow dog, an'——"

"Then you're a cowboy?" she put in.

"Well, yes. Yuh might call me that." She noted the slight flush creeping beneath the tan as he answered.

"I have a brother who went away to be a cowboy," she volunteered.

"That right? What does he look like? Mebbe I know him."

"His name is Jerry Knight, an'——" She proceeded to give him a detailed description of Jerry's looks. "Have you ever met him?" she asked.

"Don't know but I have. A young feller that looked like that came to a ranch where I was stoppin' a few days ago lookin' for work. Nex' time I go there I'll look him up."

"Tell him you seen me," she said. Then she suddenly changed her tone. "Do you know Butch Hopper?" she demanded.

She saw him give an almost imperceptible start.

"Yes," he said in a low tone, "I know him."

"Do you work for him?" she persisted.

"Well, I have worked for the gentleman."

"Lately?"

"Yes, lately. Workin' for him now in fact." It seemed to Tillie that there was a sort of challenging note in his voice.

"We've heard that he's a bad man," she said.

"He's no angel," he said grimly.

"His men—some of them—burned our haystacks, and killed our sheep without provocation," she accused.

"It was a dirty trick," he admitted. "But there are certain things you folks mebbe don't understand. If yuh could understand how these people feel about you folks bringin' sheep in here, or even just the farmin' machinery, yuh could see why yuh don't git any sympathy. Sheep means the end of everything this country stands for now, an' most of 'em love the country. Sheep will kill the range, an' then there's nothin' left but farmin'. Such things as raisin' grain an' vegetables an' fruit don't appeal to these folks. Cuttin' a crop of hay is all the farmin' they can stand. When such people as yore father gits a foothold in this country it means that the rest of us are doomed."

"I can understand that mebbe, but I can't see why they would prefer outlaws to us anyway," Tillie answered a bit sulkily.

"The outlaws will pass in time, but right now they're too strong for the people to do anything with 'em; an' the cowmen in Raft River knows that Butch Hopper will make them pay for any trouble that yuh folks put him to," he said.

"Then they'll have to pay a lot, because we're goin' t' give him a lot of trouble before he runs us out of here," Tillie exclaimed.

There was a glint of admiration in his eyes as they rested upon her, but he shook his head slowly.

"It's a foolish stand to take," he said.

"We'll show yuh how hard it is to run us out," she breathed defiantly.

"Do yuh figger I'm one of the men that's tryin' to run yuh out?" he asked quizzically.

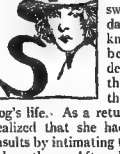
"I've knowed you was one of Butch Hopper's gang ever since the night yuh drove that bunch of stolen cattle along here," she shot out. "Ole Wuthless he give yuh away."

He settled himself more easily in the saddle and smiled down upon her.

"That brings us back to our houn' dog," he said. "I believe I promised to give him back if yuh ever wanted him. I'm ready to hand him over."

"Pa won't let me keep him, but of course I don't want to bother yuh with him, an' I imagine he'd be a dead giveaway in yore *business*," she said primly.

"Oh, I ain't wantin' t' git rid of him—I kinda like the ornery old cuss, an' if yuh don't mind I'd like t' keep him. Mebbe some day I can do you a good turn."



SUDDENLY Tillie's mind swept backward to that day of horror when she knew Ole Wuthless had been condemned to death, and she felt again the wave of gratitude to this man for saving the dog's life. As a return for his kindness she realized that she had been offering covert insults by intimating that he was a contemptible outlaw. After all he had not been concerned in what had been done to them, and she was beginning to realize that there might be standards of judging people out here with which she was not familiar.

"You're welcome to the dog, mister—an' I appreciate what yuh done," she said hesitantly.

"We'll still consider him yore property, an' me just borrowin' him till he's wanted. But considerin' that kind of an arrangement don't yuh reckon we'd ought t' know each other's names? Mine's Bagby—Vick Bagby."

"Mine is Tillie—I reckon you knowed the other part of it was Knight."

"Yes, I knew it was Knight, for the present," he grinned.

"Well, we mustn't be standin' here," Tillie said hurriedly. "Pa or George might see you, an' then there would be trouble. You know they've fenced up the canyon so you can't go down there."

"But I come down here just expressly to see yore pa," he protested. "I was in Cantgitum the other day, an one way an' another I've found out how things stood. I know he needs some good, wholesome advice, an'

I've found out that there's nobody willin' to give it to him, so I took it on myself."

"An' what do you propose to tell him?" Tillie demanded coldly.

"That for his own safety, an' for the safety of his family he had better tear down that fence an' git rid of his sheep," Bagby replied.

"Then yuh'd just as well save yore breath, for he'll only order you off the place," Tillie said positively.

Bagby looked really concerned. For a moment he seemed undecided, and then a look of settled determination came over his face. It effected such a transformation in his appearance that the girl was awed.

"I've got to talk to him anyway," he said, starting away.

Ole Wuthless had been making frantic efforts to gain more of Tillie's attention, but as they all started slowly toward the house Bagby's eye fell on the dog.

"Look here," he said. "ain't they liable to want to put a bullet into Ole Wuthless if they seed him down there?"

"Not much more apt t' shoot him than they are you," she said.

"Still, I think it would be a wise idea for you to keep him up here while I go down an' talk with 'em," he said.

"I can't let you run the risk of goin' down there alone," Tillie objected.

"Yuh don't think yore folks would be apt to take a shot at a stranger who went down an' talked to 'em plumb peaceable do yuh? I promise not to make any warlike motions," he said quizzically.

"They won't bother you if you don't try to go on down the canyon," she assured him.

"Then I'll be all right, for I'm goin' to come back this way," he said.

He left her, and at a word from him Ole Wuthless remained with her. Tillie watched him till he was out of sight, and then a spirit of exhuberance seemed to flow over her. She clapped her hands gleefully, whistled to Ole Wuthless, and then began to romp with the overjoyed dog. Just why she felt so much like playing she did not know.

Bagby was gone little more than half an hour; when he returned his face was grave.

"I'm afraid I didn't have much influence on your father," he acknowledged. "I hoped I'd be able to show him the error of his ways, but I can see that he believes in the righteousness of his cause so strong that he won't hear of any compromise. I tried to make him see the danger—not to himself but to you an' your mother, but all I got was his statement that he could look after his own family without help from outlaw sympathizers."

"An' I guess he can," Tillie remarked.

"I'm not so sure of that," Bagby said doubtfully. "I wish I could convince you folks that Butch Hopper never stops at anything to gain his ends, an' against him you're perfectly helpless. You're in more danger than any of the others, because there are men in Butch's gang——"

He left the sentence unfinished as he saw the hopelessness of trying to show Tillie her danger. After all, he thought, it was better that she should not see it, since there was nothing she could do.

"Don't you worry none about me, mister, I'm used to takin' care of myself," Tillie said confidently.

"Well, then, good-by. But let me offer one more little piece of advice. If there is any place close around your house where you can hide if anything should go wrong——" He stopped, fumbling for words that would not offend the girls' exaggerated sense of independence.

"I know a place that'll do for that all right if I ever have to hide out," she smiled.

"I'm sure glad of that. Where is it?"

"Do you think I'd tell you?" she demanded.

A hot flush swept over his face, and he turned his horse away.

"Of course not," he said coldly, touching his horse with the spurs.

A moment after he was gone the girl was sorry for her curt remark, but it was too late to withdraw it. She stood watching the graceful figure of the young cowboy ride out of sight. It was not until then that she noticed that her hands were on the silky neck of Ole Wuthless.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You'd better go with him, Wuthless. Pa will kill yuh sure!"

The dog whined softly. Then he edged a few feet from her, and seeing that she made no move to restrain him, he went bounding after Bagby. Suddenly Tillie was aware that she had been storing up a certain amount of bitterness against her father and George. They had driven Jerry away, and he was the only one in the family at all thoughtful of her. Had it not been for them she could have had Ole Wuthless, and he would have helped to while many a dreary hour away. But, more than anything else, she resented their failure to give Vick Bagby an unbiased hearing. No matter what he might be, Tillie knew that so far as they were concerned he was their well-wisher. If they had treated him respectfully he might have come again.

NOTHING could have been outwardly more peaceful than those placid October days, but the Knight family lived in a state of high tension. In the daytime Silas and George hauled a few small loads of frozen grass from the swamp land that had been too wet to cut when they were putting up their hay crop, but their efforts were hindered by their anxiety to get back to the house. Their sleep was broken and spasmodic because of their continual fear of a raid of some sort.

More than once Old Man Knight regretted bringing sheep into the country. He could have sold them before leaving Iowa and brought cattle instead, but that would have made him an imitator instead of a leader, and this was something his obstinate pride could not bear. Such regrets as he had he kept to himself. But he did mention to George on one or two occasions that he feared they had made a mistake by fencing up Beaverdam Canyon. George, however, was insistent that they had done just right. Their business was to establish dominion over the land, and the fence was the sign that they had done so.

A party of prospectors had been the first to be turned back. Knight, himself, was minded to let them go through until they had begun to use profane language. Then he had ordered them away at the point of his rifle. Several cattlemen, with Allick Peters as spokesman, had appeared and demanded that the fence be removed.

"We don't aim t' run no cattle here, not on account o' you either, but some of our stuff naturally drifts into the hills about here, an' when we round-up we need this trail t' git down t' the valley, an' we ain't goin' t' have no fence in our way," Peters declared belligerently.

It was no way to approach such a man as Old Man Knight. He curtly ordered the cattlemen off his place. Had Peters and his associates not felt certain that Butch Hopper would attend to the matter there would doubtless have been trouble then and there, but, as it was, they retreated, leaving behind a shower of threats and abuse. After that Knight felt that he could not, with honor, tear down the fence.

Then came a night when the Knight family was awakened by an ear-splitting explosion. For several minutes Tillie lay still in bed, shivering with dread of unnamable terrors. Then she heard the window of her parents' bedroom slide open, and a moment later heard the reverberating roar of her father's rifle, and a yell of pain from outside.

She sprang from her bed and dressed hurriedly. A rain of bullets rattled against the log house, and she heard the splinter of glass from her parents' room. More shots from the other room told that her father was replying to the bullets of the outlaws.

The girl's room faced east toward the old beaver dam, and that of her parents faced toward the out-buildings. George had been sleeping by the haystack as a precaution against it being burned. As yet the outlaws all seemed to be in the direction of the stables.

Tillie seized Jerry's old rifle and stepped to the door of her parents' room. She saw her mother in a corner, moaning and trying to dress with nervous, toil-stiffened fingers.

"Keep back, Till, an' stay close to the floor," Silas Knight shouted.

"My boy—my George—I know they've killed George," Mrs. Knight sobbed.

A cold feeling shot over Tillie, and she felt the instant need of air. She stepped back into her own room and opened the outside door. There she could hear another sound far different and far more sickening then the rifle and revolver shots. It was the feeble moans and bleatings of many torn and mangled sheep.

Only then did Tillie realize the meaning of the explosion that had so rudely awakened her. The outlaws had commenced their attack by throwing a bomb of some sort into the midst of the peacefully slumbering herd. George, she knew, was sleeping only a few rods away from the corral where the sheep were bedded. It would be a miracle indeed, she felt, if he had escaped with his life.

At the risk of being struck by a bullet from one of the outlaws' revolvers, she peered around the corner of the cabin. No one was in sight, but a glare against the sky told her that the stack and the stables were on fire. George, she knew, would never run, and this meant that he must have fallen a victim to the outlaws. Perhaps murdered in his sleep she thought half hysterically.

Suddenly she saw someone flash by her at an awkward run, and before she could interfere her mother had rushed past. Mother love was taking Mrs. Knight toward the stable-yards regardless of all danger.

"Mother! Don't go out there—you can't do any good!" Tillie called wildly, but Mrs. Knight was unheeding.

Then, when her mother was not three rods from the cabin, Tillie saw her plunge headlong to the ground. Twice the pioneer woman made feeble efforts to rise, but after the last effort she lay still. Regardless now

of danger, Tillie ran to her with a low cry and lifted her with strong, young arms. Half carrying, half dragging her mother, Tillie made her way back to the cabin. Someone among the outlaws had shouted an order not to fire at them, but the words were meaningless to Tillie if she even heard them. As soon as she had her mother back in the cabin the firing commenced again.

Silas Knight strode into Tillie's room and looked at the prostrate body of his wife. He stooped over her and felt her heart. A gaping bullet wound in her breast told why it had ceased to beat. He looked up at Tillie once with a look of such dumb agony that a sob of sympathy was torn from the girl's throat. But when he stood on his feet again his face was a grim mask.

"Everything on earth I hold dear is right here," he said thickly. "I'm goin' t' stand right here an' fight for it as long as I live. They'll git me sooner or later the way they've got Mother an' George, but I don't care. I don't think they've got the house surrounded yet, Tillie, an' you ought to make it to the brush along the creek. Keep on travelin' till yuh find somebody that'll take yuh in. Find Jerry an' I reckon he'll take care o' yuh. I wisht I hadn't been so hard on the boy."

"I'll stay with yuh, Pa," Tillie sobbed.

"I don't want yuh here. I order yuh t' leave. That young feller that was here the other day warned me that this wasn't no place for you, an' I wish t' God now that I'd taken his advice an' sent yuh back home till more of our people come out. Git out an' git away. Take yore rifle an' kill the first man that comes near yuh unless yuh know who he is."

The habit of obedience was too hard for Tillie to break now when his orders were backed up by all the force of his strong personality. She bent and kissed her mother's lifeless cheek, picked up her rifle and left the cabin.

Old Man Knight picked up his rifle and began anew the defense of his possessions. There was safety in retreat, but in all his life Old Man Knight had never turned his back upon trouble. He was not that kind.

TILLIE, however, had no intention of making a wild flight in the dark. There was the hiding-place she had mentioned to Vick Bagby, and this occurred to her now. The creek, a small river in itself, fought its way through the soft, petrified rock of the ancient beaver dam in a dozen places. Between two of these channels was a great hole where once almost the whole stream had coursed through, but, as the creek's channel above had changed, the stream, had found other outlets through the dam, leaving this a dry tunnel.

It was perhaps twenty feet through, and on the upper side of the dam a huge willow bush had choked the opening. The mouth of it on the lower side was ten feet wide, but not more than three feet high. Curious freaks of the water, however, had bored out the interior until it was a cave high enough for Tillie to stand upright, and nearly twenty feet across in each direction. At one side was a sort of little alcove that ran back ten feet or more, so narrow that but one person at a time could enter, and in one place the roof dropped to within four feet of the floor.

Tillie reached the dam in safety and ran along it, crouched low, in order to be sheltered as much as possible by the willows, until she reached the place just above the cavern she sought. No one was in sight and she prepared to drop over the lower side of the beaver dam to the entrance, when another idea seized her. Since there was no danger where she was, why not crawl out along the top of the dam to where she could see the yards and take a hand in the fight? She was not a girl given to hesitation, and presently she was where she could command a view of most of the ground around the buildings.

The flames from the burning stack and buildings illumined the scene with a weird light, and the heat had evidently driven the outlaws back some distance. They had taken shelter in the brush on either side of the mouth of the canyon. Most of the outlaws seemed to be armed with six-shooters, but a few of them also had rifles, and from time to time these replied to the fire that Silas Knight, kept up intermittently from his cabin window.

Tillie waited until she made sure by the gun-flashes just where one of the outlaws was hidden. Then, immediately after the next flash, she pulled trigger. An angry oath came from the place at which she had fired, but it was of surprise rather than pain, Tillie threw in another cartridge and waited.

"Hey, there's somebody shootin' at us from down by the dam," yelled a voice.

"Well, git 'em," replied another voice angrily.

Tillie decided that it was time to retreat, and half running, half creeping she made for the middle of the dam. A stab of flame spurted in the darkness at one end of the

dam, and then she felt a scorching pain along the upper part of her right arm. She gave a little whimper of pain, but did not cry out. A second later she dropped below the dam and entered the dark cave.

The entrance was visible from only a few feet away, but there was a chance that they might find it. She backed away until she was close to the end of the little alcove that was to be her last place of retreat if they should happen to find her and get inside.

The porous rock possessed remarkable acoustic properties; she could hear the men running along the top of the dam and hear plainly what they said.

"He couldn't have gone back toward the house or we'd have seen him," someone said.

"An' he never had time to git below for we'd have heard him splashin' in the water," declared another.

"What in hell was you doin', Canfield, t' let anybody git out on that dam?" demanded another man wrathfully.

"I never did see him go out there, Butch," spoke up a fourth man. "I tell yuh, Butch, I believe it was somebody from the lower side. I'll bet it's the Faraway Kid. Yuh know he opposed this raid when yuh first ordered it, an' he sneaked away a few hours before we started. I'll bet he's skunk enough to come on an' help these people."

The whining tones of this man grated on Tillie's nerves and sent a cold shiver through her.

"The Faraway Kid hell!" snapped Butch Hopper. "He knows too much to be buckin' my game that way. I don't believe there was anybody down here at all. Canfield, you an' Stacy watch this dam anyway, an' the rest of us'll go back an' shoot that old codger out of his hole, an' kill what's left o' them sheep. I said I wouldn't leave a thing standin' here an' I won't."

Tillie heard the retreating footsteps of some of the men, but she dared not move on account of the two that had been left to watch the dam. Five minutes that seemed an age dragged by. Then she heard coarse, chuckling laughter almost over her head.

"We're goin' t' have some fun, Stacy," chuckled the man who had been called Canfield. "I seen who it was down here on the dam in the first place, an' I seen where she went to. It's that good-lookin' gal that pointed us out as sheep-killers to her dad the other day."

There was an eager exclamation from the other man, and Tillie's fingers gripped the rifle fiercely.

"She dropped over the lower side of the dam, an' she's hidin' there right now, because she couldn't have got away without me seein' her. You go to one end o' the dam, an' I'll go to the other; then we drop over the lower side an' come toward each other till we find her. She'll shore be between us."

Tillie heard them hurrying away. For a moment her hands were clasped in a gesture of despair, undoubtedly they would discover her hiding-place, and then she would be cornered like a rat. She gripped her rifle harder and stepped back to the end of the narrow alcove. She felt that she could probably hold the outlaws at bay there for some time, unless they decided to shoot at her, but this she felt instinctively they would do only as a last resort. But even if she held them at bay for a while it would not greatly help matters, for she had no help to look forward to. Sooner or later she would have to come out—or kill herself, and Tillie was not the suicide kind of girl.

THEN she remembered the willow-choked upper entrance to the cave. If she could squeeze her way through there she might be able to run along the upper side of the beaver dam and get away while the outlaws were searching for her on the lower side. It seemed a chance worth taking, at any rate.

She had little trouble getting into the bush, but, once started, the crooked prongs seemed determined to wrestle with her. The stiff, stubborn branches were intertwined so thickly that she had to spread them far apart to get through. Her body and clothing were scratched and bruised, but she struggled on desperately. Finally she was able to wriggle through. With a gasp of relief she reached back for the rifle that she had been obliged to leave behind her in the bush for the moment. The bullet scratch on her right arm was beginning to make it sore, and she reached for the gun with her left hand.

For a moment the gun seemed caught on something, and she jerked it viciously and a trifle awkwardly. Then there was a thundering report, and the bullet whizzed by uncomfortably close to her head. Even the accidental discharge of the gun did not release it. It seemed to the girl that a dozen willow limbs had wrapped themselves about the rifle with devilish ingenuity. She jerked and pulled, using her sore arm as well as the other one, but the gun resisted all her efforts to dislodge it.

Yells from the other side of the dam told her only too plainly that the discharge of the

gun had betrayed her presence. It seemed hopeless to try to get the rifle loose, and for a moment she was utterly dismayed. Then her ears caught the loud, excited barking of a dog—Ole Wuthless. For some reason her despair was replaced by a feeling of confidence and her presence of mind came back to her. If Ole Wuthless was there, then the man who called himself Vick Bagby was there also. He might be a member of the outlaw gang, but her intuition told her that his presence greatly decreased her own danger.

She ducked her head and ran toward the south end of the dam. At that point there was a steep draw covered with quaking aspens that ran up to a sort of saddle pass. It now occurred to Tillie that, if she could reach this draw and get to the pass, she could drop back into the basin above and south of the house, and possibly find their horses. She knew they had gone in that direction the evening before, and they usually did not ramble far. Banjo she could catch anywhere without difficulty.

Just as she gained the end of the dam and made for the draw she again heard Old Wuthless voicing his excitement. At the same moment she looked back and saw one of the men running along the dam toward her. A yell from him to his companion told her that she was discovered. There was nothing for her to do now but go on and trust to luck. But she paused long enough to send out a whistle that she had taught Ole Wuthless to know. Then she reached the shelter of the aspens and fought her way through.

The girl was as sound and hard of body as any athlete, and perhaps far more used to walking than any of the outlaws. Their ultimate endurance would probably be greater than hers, but while she did last she was able to make as much time as any of them. She had never explored this particular draw, and she was agreeably surprised to find it much more of a thicket than she had imagined.

Breathless at last, she sank down to rest. She tried to listen for sounds of pursuit, but the blood pounding in her head made it difficult for a time. Then she sprang to her feet as she heard a crackling among the underbrush that she had just passed through. One agonizing moment she stood there poised for flight, and then a dark, bulky body broke through and greeted her with a triumphant bark.

The girl threw her arms around the dog with a sigh of relief. At least she had company. Then she realized that the dog would almost surely betray her and she regretted whistling for him. She knew it would be useless to try to send him back; she had tried that fruitlessly too many times. The best she could do was to urge him on in pursuit of an imaginary rabbit.

"Git 'em, boy. Go find 'em," she urged.

With wild thumpings of his tail, and an occasional excited bark Ole Wuthless took up the hunt. Becoming doubtful once in a while, he would hunt out the girl and receive new inspiration and assurance from her presence.

By short, breathless little rushes from one hiding-place to another Tillie was slowly making her way toward the top of the draw, but her hopes almost faded as she heard Canfield's whining voice a few rods above her.

"What's that damn dog doin' here?" the man was asking.

"It's the Faraway Kid's dog," Stacy replied from a spot so close to the girl that her heart missed a beat.

"The Kid must be here now. That mutt allus was pokin' his nose in where it wasn't wanted. I allus felt like takin' a shot at him, an' right here's my chance."

"Don't do it," Canfield snarled. "We're goin' t' ketch that gal, an' we don't want anybody else t' be spoilin' the fun. A shot would bring Butch up here t' see what's the matter. An', anyway, the dog'll tell us if he finds the gal. The ole fool allus lets out one o' them roars o' his when he sees a stranger."

"The gal whistled. Could she have been whistlin' for him?" Stacy questioned.

"Of course not. She don't know the dog. Come on."

"I'll stay here for fear she'll try t' come back," Stacy decided.

The fellow was not more than twenty feet away, and the girl dared not move. Then Ole Wuthless noisily returned to her after making one of his wide circles. This time, however, he discovered Stacy, and he did something which the girl would have thought unbelievable had she not seen it herself. His great ears flattened to his head and he sprang at Stacy with a low growl of anger.

"Git out, yuh damn houn', or I'll shoot yore head off," Stacy roared.

He launched a kick which served the purpose of holding the dog off, and they faced each other threateningly, one cursing, the other growling.

Tillie seized the opportunity to get away from the place, and in her anxiety she ran farther than she should without resting. She had nearly reached the top of the draw when she stopped again. The thicket had

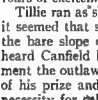
thinned until there was little to protect her except straight, small trees.

Behind one of these she shrank just in time to avoid Canfield, who, having gone clear to the saddle pass, was now returning down the draw. He passed out of sight in the darkness, but almost immediately she heard the eager whine of Ole Wuthless as he followed her tracks. Surely now, she thought, they would follow the dog to her, and her one chance was to get over the pass and try to find Banjo.

"Go on, Wuthless," she encouraged, pointing toward the pass, and, as the dog bounded away, she followed rapidly.

For a few rods right on the top of the pass she was utterly exposed against the skyline, and it was at precisely that moment that Ole Wuthless chose to emit one of his thundering roars of excitement.

Tillie ran as she had never run before, but it seemed that she had hardly started down the bare slope of the other side before she heard Canfield lunging after her. The moment the outlaw had sighted her he felt sure of his prize and decided that there was no necessity for calling on Stacy for help. He pursued silently and rapidly. Down-hill the terrific leaps he could make enabled him to quickly overhaul the girl.



LONG before she reached the bottom of the slope Tillie recognized the futility of trying to outrun her pursuer. She passed a broken ledge of rock to her left and stopped. Though badly frightened she was not hysterical. Her father was making a last stand in the cabin. She determined that she would make one worthy of his daughter. She picked up two rocks, of the size of oranges, and tossed them on top of the six-foot ledge. Then she drew herself up after them, and seized one in either hand just as Canfield reached the foot of the ledge. Ole Wuthless had climbed to the top of the ledge just behind her.

"Come down, me gal; papa ain't a goin' t' hurt yuh," Canfield invited with a crooked grin.

"You beast—you dirty, filthy beast," Tillie breathed defiantly.

The man's face became hideously ugly.

"Don't call me names, you she-nester," he snarled. "Yuh can't git away from me now, so yuh'd better not git me mad."

He seized a projecting rock at the top of the ledge and started to draw himself up. Forgetful of the numbness in her right arm Tillie hurled a rock. Had it not been for the bullet scratch Canfield would have lost interest in the proceedings immediately. As it was, her aim was not strictly accurate, and the missile struck him on the shoulder. It was enough to break his hold and send him careening backward.

The outlaw was now wild with anger, and started forward again with an oath.

"Keep back!" Tillie warned, and threw the other rock.

Her aim was better but it lacked force. The rock struck him in the mouth and nose and brought blood in streams, but it only maddened him.

"You throw another rock an' I'll shoot ye," he snarled through his mangled lips.

Tillie felt for another missile, but found none. Then her eyes fell on Ole Wuthless. His lips were writhed back; the hair along the ruff of his neck stood up angrily, and he was looking at her questioningly.

"Take him, Wuthless! Take him, old boy," she urged, and the dog sprang.

Beneath the impact the burly Canfield was knocked backward faster than his legs could carry him, and he went down with the huge hound on top of him. Any man with a hundred-pound dog on top of him will think first of protecting his most vulnerable spot—his throat. Canfield was no exception. One arm went up to his throat while with the other he tried to pry the dog off. He was able to shift the dog somewhat, but not entirely loose. Every time Ole Wuthless came back valiantly, and always he kept some kind of a hold that brought groans of agony from his victim.

Tillie was not in the least minded to stay on the ledge and hope that the dog could fight her battle successfully. Canfield's back had no sooner struck the ground than she was off the ledge. As quickly as she could she got behind the man's head. At the first favorable opportunity she made a swift grab and caught his gun from the holster. Then she stepped back and leveled it and commanded Ole Wuthless to desist.

It required strong urging on her part to get the dog to release his holds. When he did, he stood snarling savagely, ready for another assault. Canfield reached furiously for his gun.

"Here it is," Tillie said coolly, "but don't try to come an' git it—it might go off."

Canfield got slowly to his knees and wiped the blood from some of his wounds.

"What're yuh goin' t' do?" he mumbled.

Suddenly a feeling of the most violent hatred filled Tillie. She remembered the

stricken form of her mother, and the grim look on her father's face.

"I think I'll kill you the first thing," she said, and by the feeble light of the false dawn the man saw the feverish look in her eyes. He began to beg.

"Shut up," she hissed. "What right have you got to ask me for yore life. You've killed my folks without even givin' 'em a chance—an' yuh wouldn't 'a' showed me much mercy."

"I was only goin' t' scare yuh a bit. I was just aimin' t' keep yuh guessin' a bit," he whined.

"All right. I'll give you a chance to guess whether I'm a goin' to shoot your brains out or just shoot yore ears off," the girl said grimly.

She brought his revolver slowly to a level, pulled the hammer back and deliberately took aim.

Canfield could not stand the strain. He fell forward on his face with a sob. As for the girl, she did not know whether she was going to kill him or not.

An ear-splitting whistle sounded from the point of the ridge. Tillie doubtfully eased down the hammer. Instantly Ole Wuthless' ears went up, and with a welcoming bark he raced away down the slope.

IT WAS the first time during that thrilling night that Tillie was a prey to indecision. She knew who had whistled; knew that the man who had introduced himself to her as Vick Bagby was an outlaw known to his comrades as the Faraway Kid. To call out to him now looked like a surrender to the bandits. On the other hand, she felt a supreme certainty that she would be safe with him. Finally she decided to let events take their course, leaving matters in the hands of destiny—and Ole Wuthless. But she kept Canfield carefully covered.

Before long Ole Wuthless came trotting back to her, and behind him rode a graceful figure that she recognized.

"Are you all right?" he asked eagerly.

"I sure am yet, Mr. Outlaw—Mr. Faraway Kid," she answered coldly.

He had the good judgment neither to laugh nor to take offense. Quickly he got off his horse and walked over to Canfield.

"Has this cur hurt yuh any?" he demanded.

"No—that is, outside of scratchin' my arm with a bullet an' causin' me to leave my gun an' half my clothes in a willow bush," she said.

"Turn over on your face, Canfield, an' put your hands behind your back," the Faraway Kid ordered curtly.

"What the hell? You'll answer t' Butch for this," Canfield threatened.

The Faraway Kid laughed and held up a pair of handcuffs.

"Butch is already wearin' a pair of these, an' outside of him there's nobody else I'd take more pleasure in decoratin' with 'em than you, an' maybe Stacy. Men who'd mistreat a woman or a dog don't need to look for mercy to me."

Canfield was handcuffed, and the Faraway Kid straightened up and faced Tillie.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am I didn't git here in time to save the lives of your mother and brother. I figgered I'd get a warnin' of the raid a day or so before it was pulled off, but I only had a few hours. I had to sneak away, but even then I thought I had plenty of time. I was afraid that something might happen to me, an' if it did I knew nothin' could save you folks, so I took time to ride around by the ranch where your brother Jerry is workin' an' got him.

"We'd have made it here before Hopper's gang got here, but his horse fell an' crippled himself on the way. We had to ride slow until finally the horse give out altogether an' we had to ride double the rest of the way. I wouldn't let Jerry come on alone because I knew he couldn't do anything, an' he refused to be left behind when his folks were in danger."

"But I don't understand. I thought you were an outlaw yourself. I heard them talking about the Faraway Kid, an' that's you, ain't it?" Tillie asked, puzzled.

"Yep, I'm the Faraway Kid; but my real name is Vick Bagby, like I told you. It's a fact that I've been a member of Butch Hopper's gang of outlaws for some time. But I became a member by request.

"Most of 'em do, don't they?" Tillie asked dryly.

"Yes, but not many of 'em by request of the Governor of the Territory," he smiled.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

"It's hard to do anything with the outlaws at the present time because the county officers are either crooked or afraid, so the Governor asked me to see what I could do with the worst gang of 'em all. I've found it's almost impossible to get evidence enough to convict 'em, but I guess I've got enough to-night to convict Butch Hopper of murder an' at least bust up his gang in this country."

"You mean you've got 'em arrested?" Tillie asked wonderingly.

"Only Butch, Stacy, an' Canfield here.

It's just as well the rest got away. Some of 'em aren't bad boys if they hadn't fell in with men like these three. They may go straight after the scare they're goin't to git when Butch gits his medicine. If they was all arrested they might swear to enough lies to git all of 'em off. Besides that, there was too many of 'em for me an' Jerry to tackle."

"But why— how did you manage it?"

"I'm one of the bunch, you know. Naturally they thought nothin' of it when I joined in. I inquired around until I found where Butch was. He was some surprised when I stuck a gun in his middle an' handcuffed him. I suggested that he tell the bunch we'd done enough, an' for 'em to go home an' he decided he'd better do it—an' they went away. Then Stacy come driftin' in an' I found out from him somethin' of what had happened to you.

"At first I was stumped what to do until I noticed that Ole Wuthless was missin'. I remembered then that he'd gone on ahead before we got here, an' I reckoned he'd find his way to you. That's why I whistled, an' he led me to you. An' I want t' go on record as sayin' he's the finest old no-'count 'houn' dawg that ever lived for doin' that same thing."

Though he told it all matter-of-factly Tillie was able to comprehend perfectly the danger in which he had been. It was sheer effrontery for him to handcuff the leader of the outlaws under the very eyes of his men. Had one of them noticed the arrest of their leader, had Butch Hopper so much as dared make a sign, nothing could have saved the life of the Faraway Kid.

"I—I'm sorry I ever thought you was an outlaw," Tillie began, but the Faraway Kid stopped her gently.

"All I'm askin'," he said, "is that yuh'll let me an' Ole Wuthless come an' see yuh once in a while."

For a second Tillie closed her eyes, and she seemed to vision a future far brighter than her past life had been. A future in which her destiny seemed inextricably involved with that of the Faraway Kid.

"I don't see how they could think of killin' Ole Wuthless now, so it ought t' be safe for yuh to come visitin'," she said, caressing the top of the dog's head.

IN DEEP silence they returned to the house, herding Canfield ahead of them. Tillie found her father and Jerry uninjured, keeping guard over Butch Hopper and Stacy. For once the shell that covered Old Man Knight's emotions cracked, and he took his daughter in his arms with a dry sob.

"I'm beat," he said bitterly. "Mother's dead. George's dead. Most everything is burned up; practically all the sheep have been killed—an' I'm just a wuthless old man." No ordinary breakdown was that of grim old Silas Knight.

His children looked at the young stranger appealingly, and the Faraway Kid stepped forward.

"Don't let things look too dark," he said. "You still have your land here an' your home. Now that yore sheep are gone you won't miss the hay that's been burned, for horses can winter out if necessary. Some day 'fore long there'll be a railroad down this canyon, an' there'll be a town right here. All you got to do is hold on. Now that we've got rid of Butch Hopper's gang, I reckon most of the cattlemen'll be right friendly, unless—unless you should go into the sheep business again."

"I'm through with sheep," Old Man Knight said. "They'll take the country some day, but until then if Jerry wants to run cattle he can. I reckon I can raise a little money yet, and——"

The instinct to pioneer had conquered his grief and depression. Already he was busy with plans for the future, involving a move to a newer country when this should have become "too settled up," even as he grimly set about the task of preparing for the burial of the murdered members of his family.

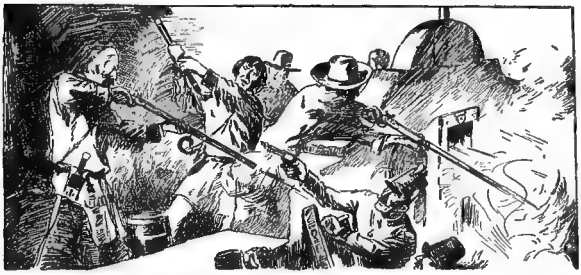
Suddenly the Faraway Kid remembered Tillie's wounded arm, and he insisted on dressing it. Ole Wuthless, for once strangely quiet, watched them intently.

Another Frontier Novelette

THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

By FRANK C. ROBERTSON

In the November issue of THE FRONTIER



REMEMBER THE ALAMO!

Real Romances of the Frontier

By MICHAEL WILLIAMS

"Victory or Death!" Thus chose one hundred and eighty-seven Texans in the face of four thousand Mexicans—and in their choosing laid the foundation for the Lone Star State and the great American West of today

FOREWORD

AS Hamlin Garland has pointed out," the history of the United States is the story of trail-makers who were pioneers in every sense of the word. The chronicle of the American frontier is the record of the growth of the nation, now the mightiest in all the world. The builders of America were trail-makers in all ways—in new forms of government, unique experiments in business, mechanics, agriculture, and science, but this promotion of the frontier of civilization could not have been accomplished without the work of the men and women who adventured into the woods and mountains and trackless wastes and carried the frontier from the Eastern states to the shores of the Pacific.

In the long, long story of a nation even the disasters and tragic failures of the pioneers become as lamps shining brightly on pathways of high purpose. Their very defeats were like experiments that in their failure revealed the way to the truer, the successful things. It is to recall the adventures of men and women, the narratives of romantic episodes, belonging to this fascinating borderland between history and legend, half forgotten but deserving renewal in our national memory, that these stories are told again.

TRAVIS drew his sword. At the same moment there went up to the top of the stout pole placed on the wall of the patio a scrap of fragile calico. Under the dome of a cloudless sky blazing with unmitigated sun-fire, the limp rag looked like a child's plaything. But as it arose above the wall, above the sheltered stillness and silence of the patio, a breeze blew it free; it came to sudden life.

"We have raised our flag—the flag of Texas," said Travis, pointing his sword toward it.

He faced a group of about one hundred and fifty men, dressed, for the most part, in buckskin, and armed with long rifles and knives. They glanced briefly at the flag, but their eyes came back at once, insistently, to Travis. He had called them together. All knew that the advance guard of Santa Anna's army was even then raising the dust upon the plain within a few miles of San Antonio. Their own scouts, hastily sent out at the first rumor of the enemy's approach, had been driven back; they had given their news to Travis, the commander; and now

Travis was to speak the word that would decide their fate. And all knew that Santa Anna came with thousands of Mexican soldiers, with cavalry and guns. Texans have always agreed that two to one, if the one is a Texan, is fair play, but—fifty to one!

Travis lowered his sword, holding it level. The sun turned it into a streak of white flame. Still he did not speak; he did not speak until he had done something that caused his men to stare at him with amazement. With his sword he traced a line on the hard, trodden adobe earth of the patio, a long line between himself and his grim riflemen. Then again he lifted the sword.

"Santa Anna is coming," he said. "He will be here in force within the hour. He has sent a messenger demanding our unconditional surrender. If we refuse, and he wins the fight, he swears that all who survive among us will be put to the sword. Men, I say I will never surrender; I will never retreat. But I leave you free to choose. There is still time for a retreat. As for me, I have drawn the line from which I'll never back away. Those of you who are with me will now step across that line and join me."

With a great shout that smashed through the hot silence, and the strained quiet of the Texans, like a bomb, every man rushed forward and crossed the line. Above their heads, from near the defiant flag, a pale flash jetted into the sunshine from the mouth of a small cannon, and a round shot sped from the walls of the Alamo toward the advancing hosts of Santa Anna.

It was the answer of Travis to the Mexican dictator. He had drawn his line. His men had crossed it. Texas itself had crossed it, separating itself forever from Mexico. Later on, across that line there poured the tide of American life of which the Texas frontiersmen were the pioneers.

Another mighty shout went up as the cannon spoke. Bowie on his sickbed inside the Alamo heard it through the delirium of typhoid-pneumonia and feebly answered it. Forced by his sickness to give up the joint command of the Texan forces he had held with Travis, he still shared fully in the latter's decision.

"That's the way to talk!" cried Davy Crockett. He held up his rifle amid a group of lank Tennessee hunters whom only a few days before he had led to the aid of the Texans. "But now I want to give Betsy her share in the conversation. She knows the best thing to say to the Mexicans."

"That's right, Davy!" "Betsy's the gal to talk!" "And the rest of Betsy's family, too!" So answered Crockett's followers. "Betsy" was the name by which David Crockett's unerring rifle was known the whole length of the Southwestern frontier.

But the swirl of laughter quickly died out as Travis was heard again, giving his orders, outlining the first, hasty dispositions for the defence. One of the first of these orders sent Crockett at the head of a small force outside the walls to forage for supplies and to clear the ground near the Alamo of some huts and barns that would give the attackers cover.

The siege of the Alamo was beginning. When it ended, the very pivot of the history of Texas, of the whole Southwestern frontier had been established forever. On the ground of that epic struggle there now towers a stone column inscribed: "Thermopylæ had her messenger of defeat; the Alamo had none." When the Spartan Greeks fought the invading Persians at Thermopylæ they perished all save one. Every one of the Texans died at the Alamo. But they gave life to Texas. And the Lone Star flag of Texas, and the battle-cry, "Remember the Alamo!" led the American advance to the Pacific Ocean.

THAT advance had first been made by a few lonely hunters who ventured over the border from time to time. There were no Americans in Texas, in any force, until Nolan's filibustering raid in 1801. Nolan was driven back by the Spanish troops. Captain Zebulon Pike of the United States Army, the famous explorer who gave his name to Pike's Peak in the Rocky Mountains, traversed the country later, crossing it from end to end and penetrating into Mexico.

As the United States waxed ever stronger and more vigorous and the surging tide of her energetic population followed the restless pioneers to whom the extension of the frontier was an unquenchable passion, Spain became doubly alarmed. Spanish soldiers were despatched hastily to strengthen the royal forces in Texas.

Shortly after, in 1811, the first officially recognized trading posts among the Indians, near the Texas frontier, were established by the American Government. American influence spread along the most distant parts of the frontier, from north to south, and ever westward. These Indian trading posts, and the innumerable Indian wars, developed leaders of the type of Old Hickory Jackson, and General Sam Houston, who were fit instruments of the American advance. Flor-

ida was purchased a few years later, and the American frontier drew closer yet to the Mexican territories, which were still under the rule of Spain, but which, like her Central and South American possessions, were seething with discontent and breaking away one by one.

These events in Latin America were intimately related to the story of Texas. In the midst of them there appeared on the scene the forceful figure of Moses Austin. A New England Yankee, he was typical of those restless, energetic, and hardy New Englanders who carried the spirit of their forefathers to all parts of the frontier. He it was who first conceived the idea of colonizing Texas with American settlers. He became the leader of that singular group of men, partly adventurers and partly statesmen, who are known as the Texas Empresarios.

They were men who thought little of risking their lives, to say nothing of their fortunes, in walking or riding across the deserts and mountains to Mexico City to gain a charter authorizing them to plant colonies. Austin was the first. He reached San Antonio in 1820, accompanied by his son, Stephen Fuller Austin, who when his father died, broken by the hardships of his journey, took up his work. This young Yankee was successful in winning from the Mexican Emperor, Iturbide, a special grant to settle with three hundred families in Texas. Austin planted his settlement on the lower part of the Brazos in 1823. Other colonies followed.

From the beginning of the colonization the Americans were oppressed by unjust and coercive measures, which increased in 1824, when Texas was made a subordinate part of the Mexican state of Coahuila. Shortly afterward heavy taxes were imposed, despite the fact that the American settlers had been promised immunity from taxation because of their services in opening up the country to civilization.

The anti-American policy was accentuated in 1829 by Van Buren's attempt to buy Texas, and in 1832 laws were passed absolutely prohibiting any further American colonization. Then a law was passed prohibiting Americans even from trading in Texas. But the step which all Americans regarded as the culminating outrage was taken in 1834, when Santa Anna issued his arbitrary decree that the Americans in Texas must be disarmed, not more than one rifle to be left to every five hundred people.

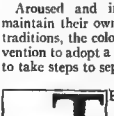
What, give up their rifles?

Never!

To these frontiersmen their rifles were almost as essential as their right arms. These men from Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia knew the rifle to be the first instrument of civilization. Rifle in hand, they had made those first trails leading from the ever advancing frontier, north, south, and west, along which the axe, the plow, and the surveyor's level were destined to follow, making broad and safe the highways of Americanism. There were hundreds of men among those early Texans to whom their rifles were as personal as the famous rifle of David Crockett, which to him was a part of himself.

To have these rifles, and the rights which arms alone could protect, taken away from them by the creatures of Santa Anna was more than could be borne.

Aroused and indignant, determined to maintain their own American principles and traditions, the colonists in 1832 called a convention to adopt a constitution for Texas and to take steps to separate from Coahuila.



THE same year brought to Texas a man who was destined to become the leader of the people. This was Samuel Houston. A Virginian by birth and a protege of General Jackson, Houston was one of the most picturesque and powerful personalities of the frontier. At twenty years of age he was the hero of the great battle of Horseshoe Bend, as an officer under Jackson in the war against the Creek Indians in Alabama. His father had been an officer in the brigade of riflemen that Morgan lead to Washington's assistance on the Potomac River. A child when his father died, he had been taken by his mother across the mountains and through the forests into the wilds of Tennessee. Houston became an agent to the Cherokee Indians, and was adopted by them. Later on he became governor of Tennessee. He was one of the most notable figures of his time.

The border towns and the lonely frontier settlements buzzed continually with talk concerning Sam Houston's gigantic projects. President Jackson was obliged to take cognizance of some of these rumors, which accused Houston of an ambition to lead the Cherokee Indians into the Southwest to establish an independent nation ruled by himself. Houston disavowed this flamboyant scheme, but he undoubtedly was attracted by the opportunity provided in Texas and he made a fateful decision to throw in his lot with the American colonists.

Houston and Stephen Austin were among the delegates who met in 1833, at San Felipe. A constitution was adopted into which the frontiersmen wrote those Anglo-Saxon principles of government denied by the Latin civilization with which they were in opposition.

The storm was rising. The opposing forces drew nearer and nearer to a clash. There was, however, uncertainty and temporizing on both sides. There was a second meeting of the Americans at San Antonio, in October of 1834, which brought the revolution closer, but it was the disarmament proclamation issued by the Mexican National Congress in January 1835 which made it certain that the clash must come. The blazing indignation which ran through Texas wherever there was an American settler or hunter to hear the news gave Santa Anna warning of what he must face.

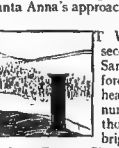
Having successfully overcome all his rivals for the supreme power in Mexico, and having contemptuously dismissed all pretense of democratic sympathy after the pretense had served his turn, Santa Anna aspired not only to be the supreme ruler of Mexico, but also to drive out the Americans from the border territories and to consolidate them under his rule. Pursuing his temporizing policy, he made no effort to carry out the disarmament decrees until he had sent a force of troops into Texas sufficient, in his judgment, to carry out the task without difficulty. There was nothing wrong with his plan, but his judgment was all wrong. He had not realized the temper of the men with whom he was dealing.

In April 1835 the dictator decided that the time had come. At the head of thirty-five hundred troops, comprising artillery, cavalry and infantry, he marched northward.

The Texans now definitely took to their arms, those long rifles of the frontier which Santa Anna meant to take away from them but which they by no means meant to give up, and the war of independence was begun. So slow and cautious, however, was the advance of Santa Anna that it was not until October that the first open fighting began, in an indecisive skirmish at Gongalez. Meanwhile the Texans went ahead with their political as well as their military preparations, and on March 2, 1836 they issued their Declaration of Independence.

Prior to this the Texans had won their first considerable fight at Conception. In December they captured San Antonio by assault after a siege of six days. Santa Anna's brother-in-law, General Cos, at the head of fourteen hundred Mexican regulars, with twenty-one cannon, was driven out by less than four hundred Texans. When the news reached Santa Anna he fell into a frenzy and swore that he would regain possession of San Antonio at all costs, and afterward would drive the Americans out of Texas forever.

He at once began his campaign, but his advance was slow; the country he had to cross between Mexico proper and San Antonio was largely desert and provided slight sustenance for men and horses. If at this time the Americans in Texas had arrived at any fair degree of unity of operations, and if they had concentrated their forces at San Antonio, it is probable that they would have won their cause in a decisive victory, without the horror and the glory of the Alamo. But that was not to be. Even the small force of Americans at San Antonio was divided, only one hundred and fifty men being there when news came of Santa Anna's approach.



IT WAS on the twenty-second of February that Santa Anna appeared before San Antonio at the head of a force which numbered more than four thousand when all his brigades joined him. Colonel W. Barrett Travis was in command of the Americans. Among them were such well known frontier characters as James Bowie, whose name was given to the terrible knife that has figured so horribly in border warfare and dueling, Bonham, the famous scout, and Colonel David Crockett.

Crockett was a newcomer to Texas, drawn there by his desire to help the Texans win their independence. He appeared at San Antonio only a week or two before the arrival of Santa Anna, at the head of ten or twelve riflemen from Tenneesse. No character of border life was more famous than Davey Crockett, backwoodsman, Indian scout, champion marksman, eccentric humorist, and for a time, a Congressman at Washington.

Around his sometimes grotesque, but always heroic figure, there has grown up a mass of legends. Illiterate as he was in his early years, he yet learned to talk and even to write in such a racy, idiomatic style as to give him a curious fame. Some of the stories associated with him have become part of our proverbial language, such as the famous remark said to have been made by the coon when Davey Crockett drew a bead on the animal with his unerring Betsy. "Don't shoot, Colonel; I'll come down!"

Colonel Travis and Bowie were the joint commanders of the little American force

until Bowie was stricken by typhoid pneumonia on the second day of the siege and Travis assumed the sole command. Because of this divided authority, no adequate scouting or outpost operations had been carried on, and the Americans were badly surprised. So hastily were they forced to make preparations for the siege that only a few bushels of corn were on hand. Scurrying the neighborhood, when the advanceguard of the Mexicans came in sight, the Americans were fortunately able to gather some eighty or ninety bushels of corn and between twenty and thirty head of cattle.

With these provisions, and their arms and ammunition, they abandoned the town of San Antonio itself and concentrated in the group of stone and adobe buildings surrounding the old mission church of San Antonio, known as the Alamo. According to one account, the buildings stood in a group of cottonwoods which, in the Spanish language are called Alamos; according to another account, the buildings had been formerly occupied by a Mexican regiment known as the Alamos. Whatever the origin of the term may have been, it was now destined to immortality by its connection with the scene of a fight unique in the history of warfare.

The Americans up to this time had fought a long succession of indecisive battles with the Mexicans. There was as yet no unity of purpose, no formulated plan of campaign. They were animated with burning indignation, and by the sense of their own inherited principles, and their desire to make these principles prevail. But there were so many leaders of powerful but conflicting personalities among them that they had suffered from their own virtues as individuals. What the revolution still lacked was a turning point, a crisis. And this was now to be provided.

By what course of reasoning, or moved by just what special motives Travis and his companions determined the course they took, can never be precisely known, but we do know that their individual wills became fused in one corporate will to die rather than to retreat or surrender. The letter which Colonel Travis sent out by a messenger who succeeded in passing through the Mexican lines one night has been termed, by one historian, the most heroic document recorded in history.

It must be remembered that Travis had ample time to retreat before Santa Anna's forces invested him. To have done so would certainly not have reflected the least discredit on him or on the Americans as a body. For one hundred and fifty men to give way before the advance of an army of four thousand would have seemed merely the natural and proper thing to do. But the Texans thought otherwise. There is something mysterious, almost mystical, in such a momentous decision. It would almost seem as if the minds and souls of these men had become instruments for the inscrutable purpose of their country's spirit. However that may be, they had made up their minds, and Travis, when he sent out his immortal letter, spoke for them all:

Commandancy of the Alamo, Bexar,
February 24, 1836.

To the People of Texas and all Americans in the World:

Fellow Citizens and Compatriots:

I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna. I have sustained a continual bombardment for twenty-four hours and have not lost a man. The enemy have demanded a surrender at discretion; otherwise the garrison is to be put to the sword if the place is taken. I have answered the summons with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call upon you, in the name of liberty, and of everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch. The enemy are receiving reinforcements daily, and will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. Though this call may be neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible, and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor and that of his country. Victory or death!

One of the many unproven legends of the Alamo is the line on the floor incident related at the beginning of this article. Whether true or not, in a literal sense, the legend is absolutely true to the spirit of the Texans of the Alamo.

THE buildings of the Alamo stood about a plaza, a long parallelogram, about one hundred and fifty yards by fifty yards. They were inclosed by a wall made of the tough adobe mud, eight feet high and three feet thick. On the western side was a row of one-story buildings; on the middle of the eastern side stood a two-story building, which had once been part of the mission establishment, and later had been a barracks for Mexican troops. To the east of this building there was a cattle yard, about one

hundred feet square, with walls sixteen feet high. The northeast corner of this yard was a sally-port protected by a redoubt of earthwork.

At the southeast corner of the yard stood the old stone church with walls about twenty-two feet high and five feet thick, roofless and dismantled. A wooden stockade connected the church with the southeast corner of the main plaza. At various places on the walls were some fourteen to twenty small cannon, including three in the chancel of the church. There was an ample supply of water reaching the Alamo from the San Antonio River which ran close by its walls, there being no less that three aqueducts. The Mexicans possessed no siege guns, and their small cannon made slight impression on the thick walls.

Had Travis commanded a few hundred more men he could, without a doubt, have withstood the siege indefinitely and been able to have fought back the assult which finally overwhelmed him. As matters stood, however, the great size of the place to be defended by so small a force was a fatal disadvantage. The Texans were given no rest by day or by night, being subjected to an almost continual bombardment and harassed by unending false attacks.

In some of the accounts of the great struggle, and in many of the imaginary pictures, the flag that from first to last waved over the Alamo is given as the Lone Star of Texas. This, however, is a mistake. The flag that waved over the Americans was the tricolor of Mexico with the numerals "1824" in the central stripe of white, this being the flag of the liberal party with which the Texans were at first allied, 1824 being the year the constitution was declared. The Lone Star Flag did not take it splace as the symbol of Texas until some little time after the fall of the Alamo. Over the Mexican army flew the red flag which signified that no quarter was to be given to the Americans.

When Santa Anna first sat down before the Alamo, he contented himself with posting his troops behind batteries of light guns commanding all sides of the fortress. By evening of the next day the rest of his troops had come up and the investment was complete. During those first few days the Americans made many sorties. Their object was not to escape, nor to provoke a general engagement in the open, but was to set fire or otherwise destroy nearby houses which gave shelter to the Mexicans. Several messengers were sent out by night to other towns for aid. One or two of these messengers disappeared, no doubt slain.

One of these messengers was Bonham, the scout, who succeeded in reaching a Texan force, but who failed to induce them to come to the relief of the Alamo. When he announced his own resolution to return, his friends pleaded with him to give up the attempt. "I will carry back the result of my mission to Travis, or die in the attempt," he declared. Using all the arts of the skillful scout that he was, he managed to penetrate Santa Anna's lines until he was close to the Alamo. When discovered he set spurs to his swift horse and dashed through the Mexicans, escaping a storm of bullets and entering in the gate thrown open to receive him.

Bonham was not alone in his heroic devotion. A party of thirty-seven Texans also succeeded in piercing the enemy's lines and entering the Alamo, bringing the number of its defenders up to one hundred and eighty-seven.

Day after day, night after night, every hour of the twenty-four was filled with fighting. Unequal as were the forces engaged, nevertheless, every American was a dead shot, whereas the Mexicans were not. Until the last hand-to-hand fighting, the deaths were nearly all on the Mexican side. Not only were two different races, two different types of civilization, opposing each other, but also two different traditions of warfare.

In Mexico, and, indeed, in most of the Spanish American countries, battles are usually fought at long range and with an enormous expenditure of ammunition. These long range engagements are carried on until one side or the other concludes that it is useless to continue. The bravery of the Spanish Americans is not necessarily at fault. Those who have really fought with them know that when their spirit is aroused, or when they are lead by leaders whom they trust, they give a good account of themselves.

Three days before the end Travis wrote this last appeal in the hope that it might reach the convention of his fellow countrymen even then in session:

> I feel confident that the determined spirit and desperate courage heretofore exhibited by my men will not fail them in the last struggle, and, though they may be sacrificed to the vengence of a Gothic enemy, the victory will cost that enemy so dear that it will be worse than a defeat. The blood red banner raised over the church at Bexar and in the camp above us, is token that the war is one of vengence against rebels. These threats have no influence on my men but to make all fight with desperation, and with the high souled courage which characterizes the patriot who is will-

ing to die in defense of his country's liberty and his own honor. God and Texas! Victory or death!

SANTA ANNA held a council of war with his staff and his brigade commanders on the fourth of March. The brigade commanders were in favor of the continuance of the siege, feeling sure that the food of the garrison must soon be exhausted and their surrender made necessary. But the despot was determined to strike a spectacular blow, one that he believed would inspire such terror throughout Texas as would make the subsequent conquest of the Americans an easy matter. Not yet had he learned the sort of men with whom he was dealing.

Santa Anna cut short the discussion by announcing that the Alamo would be stormed between midnight and dawn of the sixth. He had two regiments of cavalry, several companies of artillery, and six regiments of infantry. He planned to make the assault with the infantry, the cavalry being dispersed at strategic points to prevent the escape of the Texans should they attempt to do so. Santa Anna did not know that he was giving the cavalry a useless task. The Texans had no intention of escaping. The letter sent out by Travis contained their final decision. "Victory or death!"

Shortly after midnight on the fifth of March Santa Anna took up his station near a battery of artillery about five hundred yards south of the Alamo. With him were the massed bands of his army. When he gave the word a bugle was to sound the signal for the simultaneous charge of three columns massed on every side of the Alamo except the one protected by the river. Shortly before one o'clock he spoke the fateful word.

A bugle screamed through the stillness that had fallen, a stillness which had lasted for some hours while the final movements of the troops had been made, and which had warned the defenders that a storm was at hand. Other bugles caught up the signal, and as their shrill notes died out the massed bands broke simultaneously into the playing of a ghastly piece of music called by the Mexicans "*Deguello!*", which means, as literally as it can be translated "cutthroat," or "slice their throats."

The American forces were disposed as well as their limited numbers and the large area to be protected would permit, and as the Mexicans raced forward, yelling in a frenzy, some of them carrying scaling ladders, and others torches to light the work, the American cannon and the rifles opened fire. The round shot of the cannon did comparatively little damage, but the rifle balls, at that short range, slew the Mexicans by scores.

The first attack was completely shattered. The columns to the east and west were thrown in disorder to the north. The northern column was commanded by Colonel Duque, a capable and courageous soldier, who reformed the disorganized lines on his own brigade and assumed the command. Meanwhile the Mexican cannon had enlarged the breach in the north wall. Toward this breach Colonel Duque lead a fierce charge. He dropped with a bullet through his body as he reached the wall and the disorganized Mexicans fell back again.

On their next charge the attacking forces concentrated on the east with such determination, and in such threatening numbers, that the American defenders at the western wall were drawn away to assist on the east. Santa Anna noticed this and hurled his reserves against the west wall, meanwhile ordering a third assault upon the north wall.

In this attack the heroic commander of the Americans, Colonel Travis, who had fought at the head of his men, fell with a bullet through his brain. Bonham also was killed while serving one of the cannon. Almost simultaneously the Mexicans mounted the north wall, broke through the breach in it, carried the redoubt of the eastern barricade, and smashed through the gate at the south. At all these points they poured into the Alamo.

Recognizing the uselessness of further effort in the exterior walls, some of the Texans ran to the long building on the east, where ten invalids and wounded men lay in one big room. Colonel Bowie lay in another, smaller room. The rest of the Texans followed Davey Crockett into the roofless church. At these three points the grim yet glorious struggle was finished. The ten invalids in the hospital room shot down more than forty Mexicans before the latter brought up a cannon, loaded with buckshot, and slaughtered the Americans where they lay. Bowie fought till the last, firing pistol after pistol from his bed, dying, so the tradition runs, with his famous knife plunged into the throat of one of the Mexicans who finally threw themselves upon his bed, riddling him with their bayonets.

In the chapel a desperate hand-to-hand struggle went on, Crockett being the last to die. When he could no longer find time to load "Betsy," his rifle, he used the weapon as a club, and when he sank down at last it

was upon a pile of bodies. How the Americans fought may be judged from the fact that the lowest computation of the Mexican dead places the number at five hundred. Not a single American fighting man was left alive. One half-crazed American woman, the widow of Lieutenant Dickenson, who died early in the fighting, a negro slave, and one or two Mexican women alone survived.

By orders of Santa Anna the bodies of the American dead were thrown into a pile mingled with brush and dry firewood and were consumed in a funeral pyre. Thus the ashes of the defenders became part of the soil immortalized by their deed.

The tidings of the fall of the Alamo did not reach the Texans assembled in convention until the fifteenth. Meanwhile, Sam Houston had been appointed commander-in-chief of all the Texas troops. "Remember the Alamo!" became the word which burned in every Texan heart until, six weeks later, Houston and his men, after their marvelous retreat to the San Jacinto, turned upon Santa Anna, who had rashly divided his forces, and utterly destroyed the Mexican army. They captured the dictator and forced him to recognize their absolute independence.

Ten years later Texas entered the United States, an event which precipitated the Mexican War and led to the annexation of Arizona, New Mexico and California. The Alamo had been well remembered. Nor will it ever be forgotten.

DEATH VALLEY

ITS utter desolation is so stark and malignant that it seems to have a personality. It is sinister beyond words; yet it is strangely fascinating.

From Chloride Cliff, six thousand feet above its floor, the view is magnificent, stupendous, breathlessly awe-inspiring. It is a living threat, a shimmering, palpitant evil, and in its own accursed way a more feeling-provoking sight than the Grand Canyon.

Miles shrink amazingly; thirty seem no more than ten. Its sloping floor of burned-gray, dingy brown, gleaming pale yellow and dazzling white is strangely patterned by infrequent cloudbursts and ever-ready winds. It shimmers and writhes under the pitiless heat of a blazing sun, its heat waves streaming upward in an eternal devil dance. At our feet is a damnable valley more than two hundred feet below sea level; in the distance, vaguely seen, is Mt. Whitney, miles away—the lowest and the highest points in the United States.

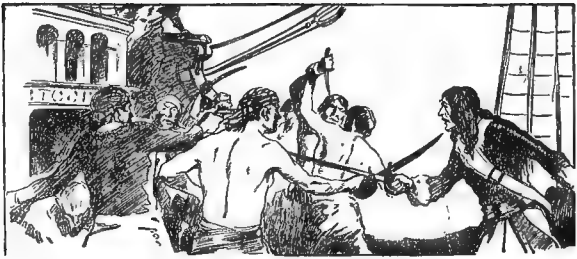
Across the valley is Salt Creek, with its buried emigrants—sixty-odd. Around a spur of the Panamint Range is Emigrant Springs, where the few survivors stumbled blindly on water, and life. Down the valley, miles away, is seen the projecting spur of the Funeral Range, around which is Furnace Creek Canyon and Furnace Creek Ranch, the lowest place in the world where vegetables are grown: 270 feet below the sea.

Down in the valley the heat often rises to 150° Fahr. Its mixture of sand, borax, volcanic rock and salt in some places make a soil so fluffy that a wise car driver uses just enough power, in low gear, to barely crawl forward, knowing that if the wheels spin in that feathery soil they will dig holes for themselves, and stall the car. To stall it is to die. Energetic or continued physical effort is impossible. The impulse is almost overwhelming to speed up. To change a tire easily may lead to exhaustion—and exhaustion means prostration, and death. Every movement should be slow and brief, with rests between; yet it requires all one's will power to keep from frantic speed. The cranking of a car is a very dangerous task.

The heat strikes inward like a rapier. It sears eyeballs, nostrils and throat until the traveler fights against crying out. To cry out is to lose one's nerve. That means panic, blind flight—and death. The Valley is waiting for just that. It strikes through every sense; through sight with blinding, mocking glare, and its threat of desolation; through touch, with heat unbearable; through smell and taste, with acrid dust; through hearing, with a terrible silence.

There is no animal life except a few daring birds, which do not tarry long. Green mesquite indicates water unobtainable; a scattered, scrawny growth of sage only emphasizes the barrenness, and this is on the higher, outer slopes. A vagrant breeze fills the dancing air with powdered soda, salt and light sand. The heat waves cause such refraction as to almost baffle vision. I caught myself photographing madly, as though fearful that the hellish scene would fade like a horrible nightmare; but it is eternal, only changing its aspect with the moving of the sun and the winds.

At the base of the Funeral Range it lies, well deserving its name, for it is Death personified; Death, plain to every tortured sense. And close by it lies the town of Rhyolite, also dead, a spectral city where once thousands toiled, its buildings serving as tombstones.—C. E. M.



THE SCREAMING SKULL

By J. ALLAN DUNN

The King's Pardon had been offered to the Buccaneers, and now the King's ships were out to make the everlasting frontier of the seas safe for all. But Swayne and his men scorned the one and laughed at the other even as the hunters closed in upon them

OUTRANGING the lighter guns of the *Gauntlet*, from the start of the fight the skilfully manœuvered King's ship had been raking the pirate brigantine with a steady fire from a Long Tom mounted in her bows. For three hours they fought, manœuvering in the smart breeze in the early evening of a glorious day, the crisp seas blue as indigo, yeasty with spindrift, the smoke of the guns soaring up in puffs like balloons as they were swiftly served by men naked to the waist, wet with sweat, grimed with powder and splashed with blood.

King's man and pirate alike wore bright kerchiefs bound about their brows, but the buccaneers aboard the *Gauntlet* displayed gaudy silken sashes, velvet breeches and high bucket-topped seaboots of leather, whereas the tars trod the sanded decks bare-footed.

Now less than a cable's length away, now nearer half a mile, tacking and veering, striving for the better position, for a rake of the other's deck, the bright red flashes of fire showed belching from the barking dogs of war as pirate's brigantine or the King's corvette rose to the crest of a rolling wave and swift gunners set tow to touch-hole. White splinters flew from the black sides that rose gleaming, varnished with the brine.

The flush-decked corvette, frigate-rigged, was handled with as much precision as the overmanned brigantine, and Swayne cursed as he saw that her captain meant to take full advantage of his heavier metals and repeatedly managed a range where the buccaneer's shot plumped short into the sea.

But at sunset the corvette came down, leaping before a quartering breeze, flinging the seas away magnificently to leeward, buoyant as a cork, her canvas snowy white, the red flag flaming in challenge to Swayne's sable banner, keen to make a finish. The sun hung in the west in a growing confusion of purple cloud and wheeling rays of crimson vapor, wheeling over a background of troubled gold. The clouds overhead were silver-white as pearl on their eastern sides, amber and amethyst toward the west. The two ships, filled with men who longed to be at the death-grapple, to decide the supremacy of law or piracy, seemed inconsequential as they fled on the lifting surface of a sea purple as the skin of grapes.

Swayne strutted in confidence on his quarterdeck, togged out in all the glory that delighted his heart: vermilion, gold-laced coat with a blue sash of silk across it, a wide belt, velvet breeches thrust into boots of Spanish leather, plumes in his hat above his hair that hung below the wide collar, long mustachios fiercely curled, a scar across a nose that

bridged out like a prow to his strong face.

Hardly less brave of attire and demeanor was Hoyle, his lieutenant, though his face scowled the more from its pockpittedness than Swayne's from its scar. Hoyle worked the ship, following Swayne's orders. Skinner, the quartermaster, chosen representative of the crew, a check on the captain to a certain extent, stood beside Swayne, his green eyes, flecked with brown spots, watching the corvette, unblinking to the increasing glory of the sunset behind her.

Long of arm and bowed of leg was Skinner, strong and active as a cat. He wore short breeches of striped canvas and a shirt of black silk that fluttered open at his hairy chest. His legs below the knees were bare to the horny soles of the splay feet.

A fo'c'sle man was Skinner, though rating counted little in this sea brotherhood. He had pistols and a cutlass that swung unsheathed against the hard muscles of his calf, its edge keen as a razor, keen as the two long dirks in his belt.

Swayne roared an order and Skinner looked at him in a surprise that blended with delight.

"You'll let 'em board?" he shouted above the rush of the wind in the rigging, the seethe of the sea and the reports of the stern-chaser that ceased as the helm was put up and the men rushed to the braces.

"We'll meet 'em half way and let the losers go to hell! But we'll set a hurdle or two for 'em to jump. Nettings there. Pikes and cutlasses!"

By the prevailing laws of the Brethren of the Sea, Swayne had the absolute right of determination in all questions concerning fighting, chasing or being chased. In all other matters whatsoever the captain was governed by a majority. His decisions were subject to a later vote if the majority seemed to consider him in the wrong, but here there was no dissenting voice; the pirates believed themselves unmatched at close quarters. The battering from the corvette had enraged them, the pannikins of rum from the broached cask amidships had inflamed their natural devilry, and they yelled in unison when they saw Swayne meant to come to grips.

XES and pikes and cutlasses were set handy while they worked frantically to stretch the bulwark nettings. On came the King's ship, her men bunched in three groups, some on the yard-arms, some with grappling irons ready to fling aboard. The dazzle of the sunset was in the eyes of the buccaneers but they were used to such matters and they bellowed a brazen defiance as the two ships closed.

Pikes thrust at men, impaling them; axes swung through soft flesh and splintering bone; pistols were fired point-blank, searing and singeing where the bullets entered. Men poured into the brigantine, swarming the nettings actively as baboons, their sharp steel between their teeth, silent but grim as the outlaws of the sea jabbed and struck at them. Men dropped from the yards; there came clash and grate of steel against steel. The grunt of men hard pressed, the groans of the wounded, oaths, yells sounded while the sunset filled the hollows of the waves with blood that mocked the gore that ran on the slippery decks of the *Gauntlet* as men rolled into the scuppers, clutching at each other's wrists and throats, stabbing, slashing.

In the south a squall gathered, hovering while the fight gained fury. Swayne marked it from the corners of his eyes, his lips set, his nostrils wide for better breath as he lunged and parried with his Spanish blade against the onslaught of the corvette's first lieutenant, an old sea-dog with a wrist of steel and the cunning of a master of fence.

Swayne swiftly calculated the chances of victory or defeat, fearing the latter, even for himself in his present issue. He was wounded in the leg by a bullet from the corvette's foretop and at his best he was no match for this man who changed his style of fence at will, who had learned in the schools of France and Italy and Spain and practised them all in bloody battle.

There was no quarter. Every man pirate of them would be hanged at Gallows' Point, Port Royal, if they were taken alive. It had been a mistake to let the King's men board. Slowly but surely they were driving the buccaneers back. Hoyle was down, cleft from shoulder to the middle of his chest by a gigantic seaman whom Swayne himself had spitted the next instant. Skinner was back to the rail, with three or four comrades, fighting like maddened cats against odds.

Swayne shouted for a rally, tried to lead it, and left an opening that was instantly entered by the point of the imperturbable Englishman. The blade ran through his chest and lungs. Swayne stood for a moment with disbelieving amazement in his eyes as the other withdrew his sword and gave him a little nod. His own hilt was suddenly too heavy for his nerveless grasp; his voice failed him; he coughed and fell with a gush of blood from his lips.

The loss of a commander may make for despair of two kinds, the one generated by loss of hope that scatters courage and stays all effort, the other that produces a furious struggle against impending doom. Skinner broke through the cordon that had hemmed him in, hewing a way for himself with his reeking cutlass, his fierce face aflame, filled with the valor of desperation.

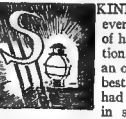
"It's over with 'em, lads, or Port Royal for us all!" his great voice roared.

The rally sent the corvette's boarders back to their own deck, cursed at by their officers for cowards, smarting and stiff with wounds, almost spent with the fury of the onslaught, the pirates in little better shape. In the lull the gunner of the *Gauntlet* appeared with case-boxes he had swiftly manufactured during the boarding flurry. They were filled with powder, small shot, slugs and scraps of lead and iron, a sputtering quickmatch in the mouth of each of them as they were flung by lusty arms wherever men grouped aboard the King's ship.

The grenades exploded with frightful execution, scattering their rending contents far and wide. The officers of the corvette jumped to bring order out of the confusion, and lead another charge with fresh men who had not yet been in hand-to-hand conflict. The pirates seized the brief respite to catch their laboring breaths. Swayne was borne down to his cabin; Hoyle left in his own blood —dead.

Then the squall swept down, ravening, fierce and fast, veiling the sunset, darkening sea and sky with its pall. The ships had lain bow-and-stern; now the *Gauntlet* flung into the wind to meet the corvette as she came down it. But the gale came from another quarter. It flung itself upon both vessels, setting the corvette aback as it stormed over its bows, driving the *Gauntlet* ahead as the pirates cut the grappling ropes, glad to see the chance to avoid the mustering boarders, maddened by the bursting of the grenades.

One last battery from the corvette's guns roared out before they were clear, splintering and shattering their quarter. As they rolled to the great waves that enveloped them, leaping and ravening [illegible] em out of the roaring blackness, wallowing and plunging before the squall that at once saved them and threatened momentarily to set them on their beam-ends, the carpenter set up a cry for men to start the pumps. The muzzles of the King's ship had been depressed for that farewell broadside, the cold shot had gone lunging through between wind and water and, with every plunge into the streaking gulfs, water gushed in.



SKINNER was a seaman, every ugly, efficient inch of him, in all but navigation. And now they had an open sea ahead, to the best of his belief. He had to save ship, to get in sail, to repair rigging shot sway, to hastily fish the foremast, quarter-chewed by a lucky shot, creaking and threatening to go by the board.

At it he went, shouting his orders in that almost Stygian darkness with night following hard on the heels of the squall, overtaking it, mingling with it. Lanterns swung and flitted here and there. The decks were cleared of raffle. In the lee scuppers lay the dead and dying of their own crew and from the corvette. The latter Skinner ordered thrown overboard without shrift or mercy. Their own dead went into the gulping maw of the sea, the wounded taken below.

Within an hour he had done what could be done, save for the needed continuance of the clanking pumps, the mauling and plugging of the carpenter and his mates. The gale shrieked and the sea rose, the tempest leveling the crests and sending it in vast sheets fore and aft; rain fell in torrents and salt and fresh water mingled in a constant flood upon her decks where the scuppers and torn bulwarks eddied as they strove to discharge the waste.

The bellow of the wind outvoiced all thunder, but jagged blades of lightning showed the sable and mountainous clouds from which they came. Still the brigantine held buoyancy; the rags of canvas still set held her from too violent lurching as she rushed down the watery valleys and climbed the seething hills. The pumps gained on the leak and at last the carpenter sealed the shot holes in the stout skin.

Skinner entered the cuddy cabin, below the quarterdeck. A swinging lamp illumined it, filled with the prodigality of loot, silken hangings, rich carpets, cushions on the transoms, a silver crucifix on one wall next to a canvas in a rich frame, both ravished from a Spanish merchantman. Carven furniture, gold plate on the table held by racks. Outside, through the great stern window, the sea slavered at the glass. On the starboard lounge lay the form of the captain, covered with a rug.

Skinner, bare-legged, the rest of him soaking wet, spilling puddles on the floor, blood on his arms to the elbows, on his face that was framed in hair almost as red, was a repulsive sight. He caught at a flagon of wine that was tucked between cushions, knocked off

its neck and drank, regardless of the jagged glass that cut his mouth. He kept at it until he had finished the bottle and, flushed with the heady stuff, flung it crashing against the side of the cabin.

Two men followed him in, Tremaine, the gunner, wide-faced, like an owl, and Raxon, a member of the crew who was looked up to by many of them because of his facility of tongue and flow of language. Raxon was a hatchet-faced sea lawyer, making up in wits what he lacked in bodily strength and favor. Both of them were sopping, smeared with blood and begrimed with powder. Tremaine's gore was partly his own and partly from the men he had fought. That on Raxon came from the dead he had helped to fling overboard. He grinned at Skinner with yellow teeth and a side jerk of his head toward Swayne.

"Dead?" he asked.

Skinner shrugged his shoulders. Tremaine went over to the lounge.

"Did you get it out of him?" asked Raxon.

Skinner stared at him blankly. Something like contempt for the dullness of the other came into the eyes of Raxon. One-time scrivener's clerk was he, shipped from the Port of London in a press-gang that he almost forced himself upon, fearing hue and cry for a murder he had committed; deserter, renegade, rat of the seas, with all a rat's cunning and, perhaps, a rat's courage when driven into a corner. So far he had kept out of corners.

He looked at both his companions, both indispensable to the plan he had in mind, if it was still feasible. If Swayne still lived. For wealth was now being weighed in the uncertain balance of the life of a desperately wounded man. Skinner should be captain. That he lacked navigation was to be lamented but Raxon did not consider that insurmountable. Tremaine, a giant, master gunner, was a necessary factor—not so much so as Skinner perhaps, but Raxon knew that Tremaine admired him and he meant to use the gunner to help him against the other.

Skinner was dull but Tremaine was stupid, away from his calling of gunner-seaman. It would go hard, thought Raxon, if he couldn't use them both to his own ultimate and sole advantage. But—if Swayne was dead?

"He's nigh gone," announced Tremaine, "but there's still breath in him to this mirror." The gunner held up a looking-glass in a frame of rococo silver-gilt and rubbed his great digit through the mist upon it.

"Give him some wine," said Raxon. "Quick! He's got to talk. Look you, Skinner, of all the six men that landed to bury the loot, Swayne alone breathes. The devil himself was against us to-night. First Hoyle killed, then Swayne mortally wounded. Payson, Davis, Poole and Gibbs, every one of them dead—and thrown overboard."

Skinner's eyes, green as sea water, blazed.

"By God!" he cursed as his intelligence reacted to the meaning of the other. "Then Swayne alone knows the place where the treasure's buried."

"Hoyle and Swayne were the only ones who ever really knew. The other four could have led us close to it. They've gone. Does he take the wine, Tremaine?"

"Aye. He sighed. His eyes are open, but they see nothing."

"They will. Give him more wine. Smile at him, you fool. Make him think you, we are his friends. Skinner, you must do the talking, since you represent the crew. Easy at first, you see? Easy, or he'll die on us. Look."

He had come to the lounge with Skinner and the three of them hung solicitously over the dying man. Raxon drew aside the laced coat, unfastened the cambric shirt with its tucks and frills all wet and red, and showed the slightly puckered wound where the sword had pierced him. Through it oozed crimson froth at every labored breath that barely lifted the captain's chest.

Raxon cursed softly.

"We need a chirurgeon aboard," he said. "He's got to talk. Skinner, you said there was brandy aft. Get it. The wine's not strong enough."

The effect of the cordial opened the captain's eyes again. This time there was recognition in them, but no especial friendliness. He seemed to recognize the errand upon which they had come, catching him on the edge of the gulf of death, bringing him back for their own purposes. The loot that he and Hoyle had buried had been their own accumulated shares of long looting. The crew had long since spent their shares with gaming and women.

THE *Gauntlet* had been careened for cleaning in an inlet of the Carolina sea Islands when Governor Rodgers arrived at the Isle of Providence with the king's pardon for all buccaneers surrendering in person before the date set as the limit of grace. Swayne, not arriving, had been proscribed but, following the example of Captain Charles Vane, he made no attempt to surrender.

Vane was now delivered over to the law at Jamaica by the men who took him from the island in the Bay of Honduras where he had been wrecked. There were cruisers out rounding up notorious commanders, and Swayne deemed it prudent, lest he be overhauled, killed, captured or sunk, to bury his treasure for the benefit of his wife and children. Much of it had been taken under privateering rules, most of it from the Spaniards, and he considered it lawful and hard-earned proceeds. Hoyle, a Carolina man like Swayne, and married to the captain's cousin, followed his example.

A boat's crew of four had rowed them ashore to one of the islands lying between Savannah and Charleston, and between Port Royal and Saint Helena Sound. The chest was carried ashore and set down while Swayne selected a place for the men to dig. Before they had finished, according to the measure he had given them, he and Hoyle, who had stepped away, reappeared and told them that they need dig no more, that the chest was already disposed of. Certain other precautions were taken and the boat returned with the crew somewhat chagrined, dimly perceiving that they had been cleverly prevented from ever divulging the place where the loot was buried. It was a shrewd move and Raxon, for one, appreciated it. It was as effective as if Swayne had followed the procedure of other commanders and killed the diggers on the spot lest they talk too much.

"Cap'en," said Skinner, trying to make his hoarse voice pleasant, to cajole his villainous features into a look of sympathy. "You're goin' fast. We've shook off the bloody corvette an' give 'em a taste of hell when Tremaine, here, fixes the case-boxes. So, Skipper, we've saved the ship."

Swayne looked at him with eyes that fixed themselves on the quartermaster's face questioningly. Raxon jabbed the questioner in the ribs.

"Out with it," he prompted. "He'll not last long. Out with it. Fair means or foul. 'Tis a fortune."

"For all hands," backed up Tremaine.

Raxon darted him a look of scorn.

"For three of us, anyway," he corrected. "Let me at him, Skinner."

Skinner gave way, acknowledging the better brain.

"Skipper," said Raxon, his weasel face close down, "you're bound for heaven or hell. In the first place they say there's gold an' jewels like sand and pebbles of the sea. You can't take yours with ye to either one. Left behind in the sand, 'tis only a mockery of what we all fought for. Look you, tell us where 'tis hid, give us a fair share of it for our trouble, and we'll see the rest conveyed to your wife."

Pleased with his own craft, his face half in shadow, Raxon winked at his comrades, who grinned back.

"We'll swear to that, Skipper, on anything ye like. Hoyle's gone but we'll do the like with him." Swayne's eyes held a light in them that made Raxon's voice grow suddenly hard. It was an uncertain light, like the leaping flame of a candle that is guttering down, but it showed mockery and decision for all its fitfulness.

"You can lie to your mates with your glib tongue, Raxon," he said faintly, "but you can't lie to me. Think you I swallow your cant?"

"You wrong us, Skipper. Believe me, 'twill go better with you if you tell us."

"Only fools threaten dying men. The loot will not be lost. The corvette will report the fight and my mortal wound. When that news gets out, Raxon, you fox, I have friends who know its location and will unearth it for those to whom it belongs."

"They'll never get it," said Raxon fiercely. Then, as Swayne smiled at him, he broke into sudden fury. "Give me your dirk, Skinner," he cried. "Tremaine, draw off his boots an' set the lamp to his feet. I'll give you a foretaste of hell, Swayne, if you don't tell."

"So brave? And jumping to my word when I was whole. You dogs! Think you I would trust you? I'm going, Raxon, where you and these two scoundrels cannot follow—as yet. It is in my mind that you will not be long in coming. I'll see to 't—I'll see to 't——" he wheezed, the red froth bubbling about the slit in his chest—"that ye are well received." And he grinned at them out of a face almost as white as his teeth.

"We know the island," muttered Raxon. "We'll dig it over foot by foot but what we'll find it."

"'Twill be a pleasant task. So, you're willing to work for it? I'll give you a cue to follow, lads, as my last words."

The syllables grew fainter, farther and farther apart. It might be that Swayne spoke against time to avoid torture, knowing how close he was to the end. His eyes still mocked them; his teeth gleamed, for he seemed unable to part them and his words hissed.

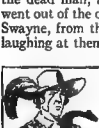
"Here's a lead for you, my bullies—and, on the word of a dying man, 'tis a good one—go, find your island, if Skinner there doesn't cast you ashore, then *ask the secret of the screaming skull!*"

He started to laugh; the mirth grew hideous as it changed into a rattle, then a gurgle, as blood broke through his relaxed jaw.

The three looked at each other with eyes that rolled back to the corpse.

"There was a skull," said Skinner slowly. "The nigger said so—and he said it screamed. Give me that brandy. A murrain on him!"

They drank deeply but hurriedly and they left the cabin. As the ship tossed, the shadows were flung wildly by the gimballed lamp. They flickered on the still features of the dead man, and, Raxon, turning as they went out of the cuddy, could have sworn that Swayne, from the far side of the grave, was laughing at them, silently and mockingly.



KINNER was voted captain, taking up his quarters in the great stern cabin, wearing boots and velvets, gold lace and a hat with a red plume in it as visible signs of his advancement. There were few of the rough crew who considered the matter of navigation or doubted that Skinner could take them anywhere. He himself believed that he would have slight difficulty in reaching the coast of the Carolinas and entering on the sea islands. As to finding the island of the treasure, he convinced himself that that was equally easy.

Gibbs, the negro who had been in the boat that took the chest ashore, was not dead. Another black had been mistaken for him in the confusion after the fight. Gibbs was wounded badly and was astounded at the care he received until the three considered him able to get out of his fo'c'sle bunk and come aft for a talk, filled with gratitude.

He was not overly bright, which suited their purpose, since they planned—or rather Raxon planned, and was clever enough to let Skinner think he advanced much of the scheme—to keep the loot for themselves.

To that end Skinner used his influence to get Raxon appointed quartermaster. Tremaine remained gunner with his semi-official rating and his extra share. All of the crew had entry right to the cabin, but it was necessary for the three plotters to meet often and these ranks made their conferences seem a part of the barkentine's routine.

To the crafty scrivener's clerk his quartermastership seemed a rare joke. He was supposed to look after the interest of the crew he was determined upon keeping out of all knowledge and share of the rich booty. There was one weak spot. Some of them might remember the treasure, especially when the barkentine again entered the sea island estuaries.

But Skinner had not thought of it, or Tremaine; it had been Raxon's wits that took him to the cabin in time to try to get some clue from the dying skipper. For that, he knew that Tremaine and Skinner both respected him, though Skinner's recognition was underlaid with a temper that Raxon handled carefully. Skinner wanted to be the master and Raxon wanted the precious metals, the gems and jewelry that had gone aboard in the chest. So he pandered to the new skipper, flattered him, moulded him like putty.

The condition of the barkentine gave them excuse for putting in somewhere to refit, and to lay low until the cruisers left those waters. Rum was served freely and the men went to bed drunk and arose "half seas over," swearing that the cruise was the right sort and Skinner a proper commander. Thus Raxon calculated to keep any of them from thinking.

He suggested that, since the *Gauntlet* had entered the maze of sea islands by Saint Helena Sound, it would be a good plan for them to go in this time by Port Royal, lest some memory be jogged and, with it the question of the loot brought up. To this Skinner assented. The liquor he swigged kept his confidence in his own powers well cocked, though he remembered the general similarity of the islands, with occasional broad reaches, with rivers flowing into them at one end and tortuous passages amongst them. There was a rude chart aboard, and they could impress a native Indian pilot and work their way to the island of the skull.

For there was a skull, fastened high to a dead pine, and Gibbs told in the cabin one night how it was placed there.

"Cap'en an' Hoyle go asho' first," he said. "Tell us to bring erlong dat ches'. Mighty heavy dat ches'. We couldn' tote it wiv our hands so we put rope about it an' sling two pole. Den we hoist it to shoulder. We row boat in I'il crick an' bye'by we come to bayou. Big 'gator in dat bayou. Time we go out, gittin' dahk, an' dose bull 'gator dey beller like thundeh.

"Big ridge on dat islan'. Pine on ridge. Liveoak an' moss all erlong dat bayou. Magnolia tree. Cactus an' spike-plant plenty. Plenty brush. Plenty deer erlong dat way. An' snake. White-mouf' watehsnake. Ef he bite you, you finish. Wil' pig erlong dat place. Rabbit an' pa'tridge. Win' blow low an' sad throo dem tree. Hants erlong dat place."

Tremaine started to curse at the negro's

tediousness, but Raxon checked him with a look and passed more rum to Gibbs. He wanted to get all the negro knew.

"Pow'ful bahd time totin' dat trunk. Cap'en he lead to top of hill. Look oveh otheh islan, an' den one mo' island out to sea. Den we neahly fall oveh somet'ing in bresh. Golly! Dat bad voodoo conjuh fo' dose t'ree men erlong wid me. Dead man in de bresh. Ant take all flesh, long time. Davis an' Poole in front. Dey step in rib, mighty nigh trip dem. Payson back wid me. He stumble too. I see white bone. No touch me.

"Cap'en look an' laugh. He pick up dat skull. He hand to Hoyle. I tell him it mighty bad voodoo. I tell him every one touch dose bone die mighty soon. Why fo' I know? Because my mudder conjuh-woman. I see li'l snake glide out erlong dat skull befo' cap'en take it up. Dat spirit of dat man.

"Cap'en tuhn oveh dat skull plenty time an' say somet'ing to Hoyle erbout makin' dat hant watch oveh dat chest. 'Nail it to tree,' he say. Den I know they gwine to die. I mighty scared niggeh myse'lf. But I not tech any dat bone. Mighty careful how I walk."

Tremaine was listening now with dropped jaw. The negro told his tale so well with intonation and gesture that they could see the thing happening under their eyes and Raxon alone was untouched with superstition. Gibbs's skin had grayed with the renewed terror of the affair; his eyes projected from their sockets and rolled with flashing whites under the cuddy lamp.

"Ev'ry one tech dose bones die, 'cept me," he said solemnly. "An' me—I come mighty close."

Even Raxon got a touch of something weird and looked toward the stern window, fancying a cold draught had crossed and slightly lifted the hair on his scalp. He shoved the goblet at Gibbs and told him to go on. The negro drained it and his skin regained its glossy plum-blackness.

"We git top of dat ridge," he said. "Mighty glad to set down dat chest Cap'en he tell us where to dig. We bring mattock an' pick erlong, stuck in ropes. Ax too. Cap'en he take axe an' cut sapling —so long. Tell us to dig dat deep. Den he an' Hoyle go off in woods fo' li'l while."

"Did he take a shovel?" Tremaine leaned forward, shooting out the question eagerly, screwing up his eyes at the others.

"No, suh. Dey take ax erlong. Take fowling piece. Dey 'low to shoot pa'tridge. Take skull. We dig, easy at first through sand. Den come rock. Mighty ha'd work, but we know cap'en he 'sist on dat hole bein' deep erlong dat sapling he cut. We sweat; sun staht to go down. All of us in hole so deep no one can see out. Throw up rocks. Bimeby wateh come in fas' but now de sapling reach to bottom an' we climb out.

"Den cap'en shoot, two time. Bimeby shoot two mo'. Bull 'gator beller back in bayou. Bird fly. Buzzut fly erlong. Dat voodoo birtl. Den I heah somet'ing go *tap-tap*—loud like woodpecker on holler tree. I look up an' I see cap'en climb way up dead pine, nail white t'ing to tree. Sun low an' shine red. Shine on dat t'ing. By golly, dat de skull!

"Win' staht to blow. 'Gator beller. Buzzut wheel. Cap'en he come down. Come back wid Hoyle. We 'speck he tell us go git ches' an' put in hole, an' I mighty glad to git troo, git off dat islan'. But he only laugh an' say, 'Nem'mine, boys. Job's all oveh. We fix ches'.' Golly, we dig fo' not'ing at all."

The three exchanged glances.

"How far away was the hole from where you put down the chest," Raxon asked.

"I dunno. Mebbe ten rod, mebbe twenty. Mighty hahd to jedge in all dat bresh."

"You think you can find the place?"

Gibbs did not know, but his life hung on the answer. The same thought was in all their minds; it needed but a look between them to leap and kill the man and silence his tongue for ever, to toss him through the stern window into the wake—once they had pumped him dry.

"I don' want to go on dat place agen," he said.

"Could you find it?"

"I reckon so."

They relaxed. Now they would swear him to secrecy, make him a steward, keep him aft, watch him day and night until they got him ashore—drunk, if needs be. They would sober him up at the point of pistol and dirk and force him to bring them to where they would see the skull—or, if the winds had blown it down, at least point out the tree.

"Win' blow hahd when we tuhn back," Gibbs continued. "Howl an' cry. An' den I hear terrible scream. I look back. *It come from dat skull!*

"Two buzzut circle low oveh dat tree. An' I say, 'Laig, save de body,' an' I run, wid de cap'en laughin' behin' me. 'Gator beller, snake rustle troo de bresh, but I come to de boat. Bimeby dey all come. We go back to ship. What happen? Hoyle die. Cap'en die. Payson, Poole, Davis, all die. How come, suppose dat not voodoo?"

"The voodoo's worked out now, Gibbs,"

said Raxon. "Have some more rum. Captain Skinner's goin' to make you steward. You'll sleep in the cuddy. You'll have it soft, Gibbs, with good things to eat an' drink. But, understand, don't you tell that yarn any more. No sense in getting the crew scared. You keep your tongue quiet an' we'll see you get paid for it."

Gibbs showed his ivory teeth in a broad grin.

"Cap'en," he said. "I'm mighty 'bliged. Yes, suh. An' I keep quiet as a winteh terrapin. Me, I don't like talk 'bout dat t'ing."

They sent him forward for his dunnage and Raxon talked fast.

"The skull's a guide of some sort. They took no mattock. They must have found some sort of cave to hide the chest. We'll find it. We've got to find it!"

He saw Skinner's green eyes watching him covertly and he read them, though he affected not to, translating Skinner's thoughts by his own.

"He thinks what's big for three will be bigger for one, he told himself. He's right. I'll make trouble between him and Tremaine. Let one kill the other. Kill each other, if I've luck."

"What made the skull scream?" asked Tremaine.

"It didn't. It was a bird—owl likely. The nigger was scared stiff."

"Swayne said it screamed. He expected it to scream."

"Maybe he thinks he'll haunt it. It'll take more than a talking skull to keep me from that loot. Eh, Skinner?"

Skinner grunted and knocked the neck off a fresh bottle of brandy.

THE *Gauntlet* arrived off the low land of Port Royal Sound in the afternoon, doing little more than drifting over a sea that showed hardly a ripple, rising and falling in deep heaves of round swell, the wind, in cats' paws, ruffling the surface and sending the brigantine ahead with little more than steerageway. Her bottom was fouled with long tropical cruising; only the most imperative repairs had been made since the fight. Her water supply was low and foul, and she was in sore need of refitting, careening and the sailmaker's art.

It was fact that none of the crew had drawn a sober breath for days, and this afternoon they were roaring, singing drunk, the intoxication doubled by the Carolina heat that made the pitch show in little beads along the deck planking.

They were all agreeable to entrance into Broad River, where Skinner promised them carousal with plenty of fish and fruit and game while they repaired ship. But Skinner's low brow was creased with care, and Raxon's weasel features looked pinched and anxious.

The same corvette that they had fought had sighted them that morning and had chased them all that day. Luck had been with them in the favor of the variable winds or the corvette, always the faster and the cleaner-bottomed of the two, would surely have overhauled them, at least have got within range of her superior cannon and pounded them to surrender. Thrice they reopened distance that had been gained and sailed on with a slant of favoring breeze while the corvette hung with slack canvas, gripped by the Gulf Current that set them to the north and leeward of what wind did blow.

To the men, drinking mock healths to the King's ship, yelling bawdy songs, the *Gauntlet* had outsailed the other, showed a fair pair of heels. Now, with the corvette hull down, her canvas, hung wide and high for every puff of the flickle wind, gleaming like a fragment of pearl against the misty horizon, they considered the chase fairly over and jeered at the enemy.

"They'll see us in through their glass," said Skinner moodily. "They'll either follow us or they'll cruise on and off outside between here and Saint Helena Sound like a cat before two mouse-holes, knowing we've got to come out of one or the other."

"Why?" asked Tremaine. "Couldn't we make our way inland, once we've got the loot?"

"Yemassee Injuns revolted three years back," said Skinner. "They got beaten but they ain't forgotten it. Then there's the Cherokees. It's all salt marsh for God knows how many miles back. Swamps on swamps. The 'skeeters 'ud kill us if the Injuns didn't."

"Or the fevers," put in Raxon. "Carolina ague's worse than the rack. Look you, this ship's consort is like to be at Charles' Town. She may send word. Leave one outside while the other follows us in. Or one come one way, t'other another. 'Tis what I'd do. The odds are too strong to risk against such treasure, to my mind. But—" his gaze traveled craftily from Skinner to Tremaine and back again—"if those drunken fools are of a mind to fight, let's give them their belly's full. Fight they must, for that cruiser is rather bull-dog than cat, to my mind. They'll never quit and, by that

token, we must be about the last buccaneer of the old fleet. The game's dead and now is the time to quit.

"What think you of this plan? If yon cruiser does not follow us in too closely——"

"She'll not do that," said Skinner. "We'll creep in on the last of the flood, if this wind holds. They'll have the ebb to stem, and the tides run fast and strong. Let us get in and I'll warrant us being let alone till morning."

"Good."

"We've had luck, so far." Skinner went on. "It may hold. The glass is uncertain. This is the hurricane season. 'Twould not surprise me to see it blow before morning, and we'll find a good lee anchorage in case of it. But your plan, Raxon; what of it?"

"'Twas suggested by a word of yours, Captain," said Raxon with a sly wink at Tremaine, whereby he established with the latter the fact that he flattered Skinner for policy and for peace. "There is a pinnace hangs above the stern window on its davits. A small boat, but large enough for four, together with provisions, and yet leaving room for—let us say—a chest. It has seemed to me not altogether fair that we should glean the booty and leave the crew no share—though they have indeed had and spent their share of it and what we take is but for our pains and trouble to see that the wives and children of Swayne and Hoyle are not left to penury.

"Yet, I say, I have a tender conscience, like the both of you. It irks me to feel that each is not left well treated at the last and I think we have agreed that this is like to be the last of the Brethren of the Coast for a whiles.

"So, why not let us provision this boat? Let us leave with the crew our blessing and the ship for their own uses and devices while we go see the loot. For this a small boat will serve as well, perhaps better. Gibbs can row when the wind is not favorable. And, since these foolish fellows might not appreciate the fairness with which we mean to treat them, it might be as well to depart sometimes in the night, this or the next or when it seems most suitable. Or we might go ashore to seek for fresh water and not be able to find our way back. The point is, we make the crew a gift of the good ship *Gauntlet* and all she holds."

"Sink me!" cried Tremaine, clapping his great hand on his thigh with a report like a pistol. "Sink me, Raxon, if you ain't a fox!"

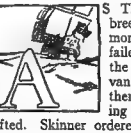
"Nay, give credit where credit is due. 'T but work out the details from the ideas that the captain, here, sets in my brain."

Skinner chuckled in high good humor. It struck his fancy to leave the crew to wait the inevitable attack by the King's men, holding the empty sack. That was a rare joke and, since he had been given the credit of it, he laughed the more. The touch about the wives and children also amused him.

"We'll see how all works out," he said. "Here is the chart with the sea islands lying close as eggs in a basket, yet with waterways between that are fairly navigable. We'll work up inside close to Saint Helena Sound, yet carefully, lest the corvette's consort meet us there. Then we'll take boat at midnight. I would give much to see their faces next morning when they find us gone. As for finding us, had they the spirit, as soon discover a pin in a haystack."

"Where'll we go," asked Tremaine, practically, "after we get the loot?"

"Make up the coast for Charles' Town itself. There will be none to positively identify us with the *Gauntlet*. We need show no more of value than will pay our way, or, should there come necessity, 'tis said the governor doth greatly admire the palm of his hand when 'tis gilded. He gets nothing from the cruisers and he has seen more than one buccaneer. Or we can go on to the settlement at Georgetown, or further still, by inland waters, to Albemarle on the Chowan River, where men from Virginia have established themselves. We can trade the small boat for a larger to some logwood trader, perchance, either by purchase—or otherwise."



AS THE day waned the breeze grew more and more fitful and at last failed altogether. Now the corvette had the advantage of a breeze further out and came bowling along until her hull lifted. Skinner ordered the boats out for towing so that they might cross the bar and get fairly into the river before the tide turned. The men refused.

He argued with them for a few minutes, pointing out the necessity of taking advantage of the turn of the tide against their pursuers, of the probability that, if they did not take out their boats, the seaward breeze would bring the corvette close enough to send shot plumping aboard.

"It's fight or pull, you dogs!" he told them at last. "Take your choice. You can sit and handle oars, but I'm damned if there's one of ye sober enough, to stand upright or see straight, let alone fight. Row, and

to-night we'll rest easy, to-morrow we'll feast. Stay here and the most of ye'll be stewing in hell by midnight—and I'll be the first to send some of ye there to tell the devil the rest are coming.

"Cross me, will you?" he suddenly shouted in a fury. "Into those boats, you scum! Into them and pull yourselves sober."

In an instant he was down among them, his sword, once Swayne's, pricking and fleshing them, with Tremaine at his back swinging a cutlass and Raxon looking down from the rail of the poop. One man protested and Skinner shot him through the mouth.

"I'll brook no mutiny," he thundered. "You make me skipper and I'll make ye skip. Look at the corvette coming up hand over hand, you mongrel fools."

The breeze still with her, the cruiser was coming up fast. As they gazed they saw a small ball of white detach itself from her gleaming side and the boom of a gun came faintly over the water.

"That's not for us," said Skinner. "'Tis a signal to her consort. Now, you swabs, will you row and go clear, or stay and be bilboed and hung?"

The boats were outswung, manned and soon the *Gauntlet* began to move slowly but surely toward the shore. Another gun sounded from the cruiser. It was not likely that they were wasting ammunition on the chase at such a distance. The consort would inevitably heave in sight before long. Doubtless they could see her already from the corvette's masthead.

"We'll beat 'em yet," said Skinner. He snuffed the air, looked high and low, scanned the horizon and then went into the cuddy for a look at his glass.

"There'll be no hurricane to-night," he told Raxon and Tremaine. "But we'll make the bar half an hour before the turn. And then our dogs can tow us up the river and out of sight. To hell with the corvette and her consort, too. We'll spend that money yet, fling it to the lasses an' put a jewel on their fingers for a kiss. Eh, lads? We'll ruffle it yet with the best in New York City or belike in London Town itself. We'll pass for rich merchants and choose us each some wealthy wench to wed when we are tired of light-o'-loves!"

Raxon turned to hide the sneer he could not control at the idea of Skinner posing as a merchant, or wooing a rich man's daughter. He had his own ambitions and on their horizon neither Tremaine nor Skinner showed.

The three had the deck to themselves with all the crew still slaving at the sweeps. Skinner put Gibbs at the wheel and the three took the chance to fully provision the stern pinnace, too small for use in towing. Now it was ready for their use at any time, the stowage covered with canvas long before the sweating and sobered men came aboard. The river had curved; the entrance was out of sight, the corvette lost in purple haze as the sun went down.

Still the wind proved freaky. With twilight, a breeze began to blow from the southwest, the prevailing wind of that latitude, coming down the valleys of the rivers that emptied into the isleted estuary. Skinner sought to take advantage of it and follow up the wide and seemingly deep channel. They could see banks of reeds backed by palmettos. Back of them, chinquapin oak, live oak draped with long streamers of moss and thicket plantations of pines. All was on low ground, much of it tidal.

Through the evening sky moved lines of cranes, great flocks of belated ducks coming in from the night. They saw buzzards wheeling and once, when the barkentine tacked, in the momentary silence before she came about, they heard the Carolina nightingale, the mocking bird, that knows no special hours of song. Fish leaped all about them; porpoises and dolphins rolled and the great rays leaped to fall with a resounding crash. Shut in from the sea, here seemed an inter-island paradise—save for the mosquitoes, hovering in clouds.

It was partly the mosquitoes, partly the terrific force of the ebb, increasing momentarily in power and violence as they advanced that proved their undoing. Skinner sought to find anchorage where the breeze would be the strongest and blow the pests from the ship. They passed two islands between which the tide came eddying and swirling to join the main stream.

There was a leadsman in the chains but the men had started drinking again with their supper when they came abroad from towing, and doubtless the man was incapable. The thing came about suddenly enough yet gently, as the *Gauntlet*, clutched by the tide, nosed on a bar of soft but clinging mud and sand, glided on until suddenly she came up with sails shivering, held fast.

Skinner swore volubly but, beneath his cursing, made up his mind that this was the night for their desertion of the barkentine and the crew. On the falling tide they could not hope to get the *Gauntlet* off, nor was there much chance of getting off by kedging and warping, even on the top of the flood, so deep had she keeled into the stuff that would hold her faster yet before the tide changed. But he did not announce this.

After his first outburst, mainly directed at the man with the lead, he made light of the situation.

"It's only soft bottom. No damage. This is a good place to stay till she floods again. Right in the breeze."

He got two fiddles going, had rum brought up and before two hours the deck was a pandemonium that might almost have been heard outside at sea.

If the corvette had sent in boats then the barkentine would have been an easy conquest. To the tunes of the fiddles men howled ribald ditties and danced clumsily, locked with each other like bears broken into a distillery. Raxon watched all from the poop rail, Tremaine beside him, while Skinner mingled at first with the men, edging them on to the intoxication that would presently turn to maudlin daze and then oblivion.

The eyes of the ex-scrivener's clerk glittered, his nostrils dilated. He seemed almost to quiver with repressed activity, like the weasel he was. His brain was busy with many things. Tremaine, big, stolid, leaned his great forearms on the broad rail. Gibbs hovered in the background, waiting orders to bring fresh mugs of wine for the quarter-deck gentry. Tremaine swigged down some rare Xeres as indifferently as if it had been small beer. Raxon drank more appreciatively, more sparingly. He liked the warmth of the wine, the flavor, the effect that charged his courage. But he wanted to keep his head clear.

"Have you had any words with Skinner?" he asked Tremaine.

"Me? None. What of it?"

"Nothing. Tremaine—" he hesitated a moment—"mark you, you are my friend and with them I play fair to the last drop, the last coin. I may be wrong but Skinner seems to grudge you your share in this loot. He seems to fear that you will give us away by your behaviour after we get clear. Nothing outright, mind you, but little doubts that are close to slurs and put, so I think, to sound me as to whether I agree with him. Skinner will bear watching, Tremaine."

"'Stap me, but if I catch him in treachery I'll wring his neck. I'll tear the windpipe out of him and make him chew on't," growled the giant.

"Go easy, man. I'm not sure. If I am, at any time, I'll tell you. Meantime you and I are with each other. We'll pledge to that. Gibbs!"

His face hidden in his cup. Raxon grinned, knowing he had sown the swiftly developing seeds of unrest and mistrust in Tremaine's simple mind.

TWO hours after midnight they were away. The crew lay about the decks in stupor as Raxon and Skinner came up to the poop and lowered the pinnace without a splash. Then, from the stern window, all four swarmed down the ropes and cast off. Gibbs took the sculls and, pulling athwart the current, rowed them up a creek, though he protested against landing there.

"Too dahk fo' to see," he said, "but plenty 'gator lie on dem bank. Swish you wid tail an' you go into wateh—dat end of you. Bimeby, flood come, dey all go into hole undeh wateh. Betteh wait till flood come erlong, wait till sun come up."

"It's a good idea—curse the mosquitoes!" said Raxon. "Think you the corvette will be in on the flood, Skinner? If so we might lay low and watch what happens." He chuckled in the darkness as if he were looking forward to witnessing a play.

Skinner could match that mood and did so. Tremaine said nothing. Whatever he might have thought concerning the treachery of their desertion was overbalanced by the glitter of gold and jewels that was ever before his eyes.

They all smoked constantly to protect themselves from insect bites, swigging occasionally at the liquor they had brought along, dozing off until the negro wakened them. Dawn was in the sky; Vs of ducks were aflight with the strings of cranes and herons. The tide was high up in the reeds and still rising fast.

Gibbs's eyes showed bursting; his ears seemed to be pricked forward.

"I hear plenty rowing," he said in an awed whisper.

They all listened. Plain to their accustomed hearing came the *click-clack* of oars in the pins, sounding across the water, far off. They knew it did not come from the *Gauntlet*, did not threaten themselves. Down along the reeds to the exit of the creek they hauled with their hands. Before they quite reached it the sound had ceased but they saw a little flotilla of four cutters, oars shipped now and lugs set to the light wind. Swiftly the cutters came on the incoming tide, making for the barkentine where the buccaneers snored on in drunken sleep. They could see the level sunlight catch and twinkle on weapons, on accoutrements of the officers.

"There'll be rare fun soon," said Skinner. "We're well out of it."

But there was little spectacular about the

thing that happened, save for its ending. The cutters were close to the *Gauntlet* before some buccaneer with a splitting head and swollen tongue sought the water tub and sighted them, striving to arouse his stupefied comrades in time for a futile resistance. Hardly a shot was fired. From the creek mouth they could see the flash of blades and hear a few shouts promptly followed by hurrahs that were undoubtedly the cheers of British seamen. It was all over in a few minutes. Then the corvette appeared, following up her boats on the lifting tide, a signal weft flying. A cutter stroked back to her, received orders and returned.

The pirates were bundled overside into the sterns of the boats, huddled under the pistols of their conquerors, bound for judgment and the penalty of their acts as proscribed men. Had the *Gauntlet* been surrendered at Providence, any irregularities would have been winked at and, though probably any present loot would have been appropriated, past offences would have been assumed to have been committed under privateering custom against the King's enemies. Letters of marque were readily enough obtained from venal commissioners and the surrendering buccaneers were given the benefit of a doubt as to their sincerity in adhering strictly to the articles of their commissions.

But these poor wretches were bound for Execution Point, there to swing as examples of those who had defied the King's leniency. Skinner jeered at them and Raxon grinned silently, his tongue showing between his teeth. Tremaine, gold-blinded, looked on without comment. Only Gibbs muttered something in commiseration of his late comrades till Skinner turned fiercely on him.

"Quiet, you black dog! But for us you'd be with them."

"They got 'em asleep," said Raxon. "They've never missed us. They'd not ask for us by rank, knowing they killed Swayne. It may never come out till the trial that we got away. Look, they've set the ship afire!"

"Too much trouble to get her off for a prize," said Skinner with a shrug, as smoke curled up from both hatches and swiftly increased. "That's the end of her. Let's be getting back into cover."

Raxon began to laugh, silently.

"It is rare," he said when his fit was over. "Yon corvette's captain goes bragging that he has killed Swayne. The news goes to Swayne's relatives—if he told the truth in that matter—and they will presently come down to find the treasure—and find it gone."

"Art so sure of finding it?" asked Tremaine.

"Aye," answered Skinner with a snarl. "If we dig the island over."

They did not dare show themselves in the open for fear their absence might be marked, the question of the loot brought up. For two days they did not dare to light a fire and, at the end of that time, they were lost in the labyrinth of the islands where blind channels led into marshes and baffled them fifty times. Reeds grew high above them in the passages and the rough chart was worse than useless. They saw no Indian pirogues nor sign of natives.

On the third day, their best edibles gone, they caught fish and found oysters, not daring to fire a shot at the game they saw. This time they landed and waded to high land to find wood and broil their catch. The mosquitoes plagued them by day and tormented them by night, despite smudges. The bites festered; fevers came on them with chills that held them gripped with ague and left them weak as children.

Gibbs climbed a tree and announced that he saw the main channel and no signs of the cruiser. So they worked their tedious way to open water and crossed it, veering north and seaward, bearing in mind the negro's description of the two islands he had seen between him and the sea from the island of the screaming skull. Now they began to calculate how soon the dead captain's relatives might come with explicit directions.

They were prepared to fight, to murder for the loot; but suppose they arrived too late? They had been ten days in the maze of marshes and islands that were separated and made true islands only at high tide. In the channels, masked by reeds and palmettos, the currents raced, as often against them as in the direction they wished to go, wasting their time. They grew morose in speculation of it. No longer were they three joined in one enterprise. Skinner seldom talked to them and Raxon ever stirred the poison he had brewed in the mind of Tremaine, with Skinner's attitude to color his suggestion.

The big man glowered at Skinner, becoming obsessed with the idea that the other was plotting how to obtain the loot for himself, though Skinner's main worry was that they had lost too much time. Once he set the blame on Raxon for suggesting the small-boat cruise, but Raxon, fairly sure by now of Tremaine's support, snarled back and reminded him that he, as captain, was responsible for the *Gauntlet* having run aground.

Gibbs watched the three white men with rolling eyes, his blubber lips seldom opened in speech. He was the slave of them all, rowing hour after hour while they lolled in the

stern sheets, catching their provender, cooking it, and dreading more and more, as they worked up to where they thought the island lay, that the voodoo of the dead man and the skull would surely be worked upon him for coming back into its province.

TWO more days passed, spent in coasting islands and looking through Gibbs's eyes for familiar signs, searching the trees for one that bore a white object. Their cocksureness faded; they accused Gibbs of misleading them, of deliberately passing signs he knew, threatening him, shaking with malaria, burning with fever, their bones aching with the back breaking *dengue*.

It was Raxon who, at dawn one morning, shook the rest—save Gibbs—and pointed out, across a wide stretch of golden water, an island with a ridge running lengthwise. The ridge was set with pines and on one of these, near the center, something caught the early light and flared like a ball of fire, then faded to white as the sun rose and the light slid down from the tree-tops.

They gazed at it with jaws agape and straining eyes. It was the island of the skull!

"Say nothing to the nigger till we get him ashore," whispered Raxon. "He'll not notice it if we set our course right. If he knew it he might balk."

"Let him," said Skinner. "Let him try to thwart us."

But they took Raxon's advice, distracting Gibbs's attention till they had started when he, with his back to the bows of the pinnace, could see nothing. Yet he sensed something. As they neared the shores and looked for a landing, he suddenly stopped rowing.

"Go on," ordered Skinner, but the negro's face seemed to have fallen in, the broad nostrils seemed pinched, the cheeks hollowed, and the flesh was gray and beaded with sweat.

"It de place," he muttered. "Voodoo brought us here."

"Is that the creek you rowed up with Swayne and Hoyle?" demanded Skinner. Gibbs nodded mutely. "Then go up it."

"No, suh. If I go ashore dat place I die fo' suah. No, suh! I don' go."

Skinner whipped out the pistol he had primed and kept beside him on the stern seat.

"You'll die now, if you don't go on," he said grimly. "Row."

"Buccra," pleaded Gibbs, while the tide set them down, past the creek entrance. "Voodoo on dat place. You all die suppose you go. I not go."

His oars trailed. Skinner raised the pistol. The flint lifted.

"Take up those oars, you dog!"

Gibbs looked pleadingly at Raxon and Tremaine, but got no sign of pity. The same thing was in the mind of all of them. They had sighted the skull. They could find the excavation that had never been filled in. He could do little more for them. They had never meant him to share the loot and become a danger to them. He was doomed.

Suddenly the negro sprang up and leaped overside, swimming out into the channel. Skinner sighted deliberately and fired. The bullet struck Gibbs at the base of the skull and he sank instantly.

"Let the 'gators eat him," said Skinner. "Tremaine, will you row."

The giant pulled vigorously and they passed in, landing at what seemed a convenient place. Through cactus and agave, through thickets of palmetto and thorny briars, they fought their panting way each intent, in that mad race, on reaching the ridge and finding the pine, heedless of the others. Once they passed a pool where alligators floated like great logs and, skirting it, Skinner narrowly missed being bitten by a water moccasin. He slashed off its head with the cutlass he carried as a brush cutter.

The fever caught Tremaine and he pulled up, shaking and spent. The others did not heed him until they heard his exultant shout. He had found the hole dug by the four men who had died. It was half full of water.

Now they hunted under the hot sun like dogs on a rich scent, thrashing through the brush, seeking caves in a likely looking ledge of sandstone. Noon came and exhausted, torn, bloody, grimed and soaking wet with their own hot sweat, their tongues hanging out of swollen lips, they still pursued the quest, crawling into smothering holes, prodding others with boughs.

There was no sound from the skull that now and then attracted their glance. Once Skinner shook his fist at it, swearing the thing was set there to mock them. They had brought nothing to eat or drink from the boat and none would go back for it, slaking thirst in a hole dug beside a pool too foul for them to risk without some filtration. By mid-afternoon they were done and they flung themselves down exhausted.

The sun began to sink and a wind rose, moaning through the pines. Alligators began to bellow in the lagoons, mudhens called weirdly and once again the long flights of

cranes commenced, with the ducks coming in for the night feeding. The buzzards they had seen all day, whenever they happened to look skyward, were still circling, soaring on extended pinions, effortless, afloat rather than flying, watching for carrion.

Tremaine was close to Raxon, who was sick with disappointment and fatigue, sick with the fever, despondent, realizing that they were practically castaways in these fever-ridden, mosquito infested swamps.

"The nigger was right," said Tremaine huskily. "This place has a conjure, or a curse, or both, upon it. We're fooled. Skinner made hint to me, if we should find the loot, that there would be more for two than for three. But I checked him and he saw I was not with him. You were right, Raxon, he is a scoundrel."

"Aye—did he not want me to join with him against you? Now he turns to you to help him against me. If either one of us fell for his plans he would murder the survivor in his sleep. 'All for one and that one, Skinner,' is his motto. Much good it will do him. There's nothing to divide."

"It must be hereabouts," said Tremaine doggedly, "but we can't find it after dark and 'twill be that in an hour. Better get back to the boat. I'm famished and my throat aches for a swig of liquor. Come on."

They both spoke to Skinner who grunted and slowly followed them down. Tremaine led, traversing the ridge to avoid much of the worst of the thorny, prickly undergrowth and to strike down some gully to the creek.

THE twilight purpled, the sun swimming in a mist that turned it to a scarlet disc, then to a crimson, lighting luridly bank after bank of clouds that reached half-way to the zenith. The wind soughed mournfully, coming from the southwest with sudden piping gusts. The air seemed cold.

Tremaine turned into a sandy draw and abruptly halted with an exclamation. Fairly in their path was a chest, metal bound, substantial, big enough to hold the ransom of three kings. With hoarse shouts they all raced toward it, trying the lid, flinging back the hasp before they noticed there was no padlock.

The chest was empty—empty as a broken gourd!

A gust of wind came whistling down the draw, driving grains of sand before it. Suddenly a high-pitched scream sounded, exultant, mocking, devilish. Instinctively they looked around and up. Plainly from the head of the gully where they stood they could see the dead pine. The skull seemed to gaze in their direction, the sunset dying it blood-red from dome to gaping jaws, the eye sockets purple.

Again the scream came and Tremaine wheeled and started to bolt down the draw, plunging through the soft sand like a startled bullock. Skinner stood with his face turned up, snarling half in defiance, half in fear, while Raxon's little eyes glittered in his weasel face like those of a trapped animal.

With that fearful cry the buzzards seemed to wheel lower, the sky to darken. Slowly Tremaine came back as the screams ceased, half ashamed of his panic. The wind was still blustery and all about them the palmettos thrashed as the three stared at the empty chest, the end of their hopes.

"'Tis Swayne's folks! They've beaten us to it," croaked Skinner. "And you to blame or 't, Raxon!"

"You lie!" It needed but small spark to set the tinder of their tempers aglow.

Skinner caught up his cutlass and leaped at Raxon, the blade gleaming red in the rays that streamed into the mouth of the gully, his shadow springing grotesque in front of him. Raxon drew his pistol from his belt and fired it pointblank, but the priming was poor, dampened perhaps by the sweat that had poured out of him all day. There was only a fizz and a flash in the pan. With a squeak of terror he flung the useless weapon at Skinner, turned and ran, dodging behind Tremaine. Raxon was no fighter.

Furious, frenzied with disappointment, Skinner cursed at Tremaine for being in his way, and cut at him as he seemed disposed to shield Raxon. The blow sank deep in the giant's defending forearm and the hot blood spurted. With a roar of rage, the gunner caught the cutlass blade, regardless of its edge against his palms, and wrested it away. Then his bleeding hands clutched at Skinner's throat, choking him.

Skinner's own hands sought to tear away the frightful grip that shut off blood and breath. He wheezed as his eyes seemed popping out, his body writhing while he strove to reach Tremaine with kicks that the other did not feel. The strangling appeared for the moment to deprive Skinner of reason; he fought without thought of weapons, striving only to loose the vise about his neck.

Raxon stood apart, watching the struggle. There was barren gain for him now in what he had meant to bring about, but he exulted in Skinner's plight. Tremaine's strength

could be used to good advantage in getting away from the place.

Suddenly Skinner fell, limp to all seeming, and Tremaine fell over him to his knees, shaking him as a bulldog might shake its victim. Blood was pouring out of Skinner's mouth and nose; his face was almost black. Yet he had one blow left in him, a last convulsive attempt to best the other. Tremaine's grip may have slackened in the fall. Skinner's groping hands found the hilt of Tremaine's two-edged dirk that slid easily from its sheath. Deep into Tremaine's belly Skinner thrust the keen steel. The gunner toppled forward, fairly on top of his victim. His grasp on Skinner's throat relaxed as the blood gushed from him, but those steel-strong fingers had done their work. The last of Skinner's strength went in that stab.

Raxon watched Tremaine writhing on top of the other until he stretched out, shuddered and lay still. He had retrieved and reprimed his pistol and now he carefully sent a bullet crashing through Skinner's forehead.

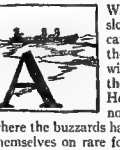
His face was that of a balked devil as he turned to go down to the boat, leaving the two behind him on the blood-soaked sand. The last of the sun had left the gully. It was swiftly dark. All about him the palmettos rustled and clashed as the wind whooped. Out of the darkness the two buzzards had dropped and lit at the head of the draw.

Raxon struggled on as best he could toward the creek, sure that Tremaine had chosen wisely when he picked the gully and that he had only to follow it down to find the water and then the boat. He looked forward to a great draught of brandy. He was in bad shape and felt the fever coming on as he staggered and stumbled through the brush, tripping, held back by thorns, stumbling into bayoneted agaves.

On the brink of the creek, now at low tide, something rustled and struck at him through the soft leather of his Spanish boots. He felt the blow and then the fangs and, though he saw nothing, he visioned a stumpy serpent gliding away. He knew what it was—a moccasin—perhaps the very snake that had slipped out of the skull.

Swiftly the virus ran through his tired body. He felt sick and weak and sat down on a log. Instantly it moved and, with frightful swiftness, flailed with an armored tail that smote Raxon from his feet, his legs broken. Then the bull alligator clamped his jaws upon his prey and waddled toward the creek, dragging the clawing thing that gibbered until first mud, then water, filled its mouth.

High up on the ridge, as the ripples spread out, the palmettos clashed together, the wind whooped, and, high above it, a scream came from the top of the pine where the skull dimly showed. It startled the gluttonous buzzards for a moment; then they went on tearing, gobbling in the dark.



A WEEK later a turtling sloop from Georgetown came to the island and the brother of Swayne's widow, with a cousin and the younger brother of Hoyle landed. They did not go near the gully, where the buzzards had gathered and glutted themselves on rare food, but passed the excavation and, without looking for the chest, went on to the tree of the skull. There was a fair breeze in the pinetops. The three men rolled up the sleeves of their shirts, two took up axes, while the third glanced aloft.

"I thought you said it screamed when the wind blew?" he asked Swayne's brother-in-law.

"It does, but the wind has to be from the southwest and this has quartered from the usual. Moverover it has to be almost a gale to make the device work. It's simple enough. Swayne wrote that he had borrowed it from the Indians of the Isthmus, who use it on the tree-graves of their chiefs. The skull sets in a fork and they made the whistle of a tube, a funnel and a tongue of thin metal, to rest in the crotch below it.

"Swayne wrote he never meant to bury the chest in the hole he made them dig, lest they blab about it, but he did not think of the tree until he had climbed it with the skull he meant to set there as both guide and warning. You have to mount half-way before you note the opening that tells you it is hollow. They could not see him from the hole where they were busy digging and he had Hoyle send up the contents with rope and a sack he made of his shirt. Swayne hauling and pouring the stuff into the hollow of the tree. Well, let's get at it. It should be but a light task."

The keen blades bit into the dead wood fast and, presently, the pine toppled and fell crashing to the ground, hollow for half its length. The stump was a heaped casket of objects that gleamed and shone and sent off dancing rays of colored light. From the trunk there rolled other precious things, while more remained within. Gold and jewels winked more brightly as the dust settled.

Through it one of the three saw the skull bound from the ground and, after its leap, go rolling down into a nearby gully. Then he started to help gathering up the loot.

GOOD MEN ALL

By EDWIN L. SABIN

Shoulder-straps and chalk lines may prevail in an army post, but out on the Indian-infested plains of the Wyoming frontier the test goes far deeper than uniform or station

HE sutler's store at meager Fort Ritchie of Wyoming Territory was well patronized this afternoon following drill recall. The pine bar on both sides of the chalk line that divided enlisted men from commissioned officers was fringed with the blue figures washing the dust from their throats.

Of the chalk line upon the plank floor, a primitive measure indicative of the upper and lower houses, so to speak, Private Peters was not informed as yet, he being a newly arrived recruit and subject to proper hazing. Moreover, the line was almost scuffed out by boot soles, although his more experienced fellows instinctively avoided trespass, as an educated cow-horse recoils from the flimsy barrier of the rope corral.

Little by little he was tolled on, until, to the delight of the troopers and the keener delight of the doughboys, their service rivals, in his innocence there he was, as old First Sergeant Madigan of Troop C phrased it, "B' gorry, bleatin' for his beer right amongst the shoulder-straps!"

But not for long. A hand clapped heavily upon his own shoulder, bare of aught save ill-fitting blouse; he was whirled about, caught a startled brief glimpse of an irate reddened countenance, and, incited by a hearty oath, went spinning, just grazed by the toe of a cavalry boot.

Panting somewhat from his exertion, stout Major Ramson of the Quartermaster Department, here upon tour of inspection, resumed his glass.

"Gad!" he proclaimed. "What's the Service coming to, I'd ask, when a raw buck private stands up to drink with officers? Drill 'em in manners, too, I say; drill 'em in manners."

Recruit Peters was aware of the grins and rude hilarity of the rank and file; and of the indulgent laughter of the stripes and straps, who accepted the old major as a grenadier; and particularly of the quizzical smile upon the boyish face of Second Lieutenant Ramson. The young shave-tail, fresh from the Military Academy, was commanding officer of Troop C during the illness of Captain Bent. The long hot afternoon drill to the peremptorily barked orders of that slim-waisted stripling still preyed upon Peters' choler, as it had stirred the bile of other malcontents.

Meanwhile Peters was wondering what this sudden violence was all about. Sturdy, hard-weathered Pat Madigan, his troop sergeant, enlightened him.

"An' served ye right, too! Would ye be drinkin' wid your betters? On the wrong side the line, you were. You see the chalk line, on this flure? Put your nose to it. Well, 'tis this side for the likes o' you, an' of me, too—for all the rank an' file an' civilian employees; the other side for the officers. 'Tis in the int'rests o' discipline. Now don't

go to disgracin' the troop ag'in wid your lack o' manners."

Bunce, troop third sergeant, sneered.

"Betters!" he repudiated. "Since when was some old copper-bellied coffee-cooler better than a good up-standing lad from the Bowery? And where's a parlor dandy a better man than us who were chasing Injuns on one bar lack a day while he was eating bread and milk for his complexion?"

"None o' that now, Bunce," warned Madigan.

"I can speak my mind, Pat. I'm off duty," his junior retorted. "Come on and have a drink, Peters."

Peters stood to his glass of beer, while the good-natured badinage of troopers and doughboys continued to assail him.

FOLLOWING Stables this afternoon there was a welcomed interim until Retreat Parade, time enough for a swim, up the creek at the edge of the post limits.

"Betters, is it?" scoffed Bunce, to Peters, as the squad of them frolicked and washed off the day's perspiration, behind the willows that screened them from the post buildings. "One man in the Row and the other in barracks, and the difference between 'em a broad stripe and a pair of straps. What's the regulation that gives an officer license to throw the boots into a fine lad who means no offense? Put the two of 'em out of uniforms and we'd soon see who's the better man; eh, Peters?"

"Sure, old Four Fingers was only showin' off for the lieutenant," laughed somebody, using the nickname fastened upon the major because of the well known size of his drink.

"Of course," the sergeant sarcastically assented. "Educating papa's pet to the customs of the service. It's a great thing—a pair of shoulder straps without any bars. Makes the better man. That's what they're taught at the Academy. They're all better men, are they? Well, a chalk line and bawling 'Fours right!' when you mean 'Fours left!' don't make the better man; eh, Peters? You ain't the son of any brass bound coffee-cooler and you didn't draw your rations at any 'Point'; but if you had that chalk line outfit where you hail from you'd soon prove up who's the better man; eh, Peters?"

"You bet I would," said Peters, inspired by the comradeship of the mouthy sergeant, and resentful of fancied insults. "All I'ask is one round."

They had been pulling on their trousers.

"Sh!" cautioned somebody. A slender erect figure had rounded the willows. It was Lieutenant Ramson, in flannel, shirt and old cadet dungaree overalls, carrying a fishing rod. The men stood at embarrassed attention.

Really they had no adequate grievance against Second Lieutenant Douglas Ramson, beyond that it was irksome to be ordered about by an over-meticulous youngster just out of school, and he the hopeful of old Four Fingers the martinet.

The lieutenant stopped abruptly.

"I heard you, Peters. So you think you're a better man than I am, do you? Except for the chalk line and the shoulder straps!"

Peters gulped.

"And you'd encourage him in that opinion, would you, Bunce? That's your idea of discipline, is it? To make the new recruit think he's being ridden because he, an enlisted man, has to take orders from an officer? And can't drink with the officers? Are you ready to command the troop, Peters?"

"No, sir."

"Or you, Bunce? You'd say you're fit to step from third sergeant to a commission, even second lieutenant; cross that 'chalk line' you yawp about and serve as adjutant, quartermaster, anything else, besides passing on strategy and grand tactics and Lord knows what?" The lieutenant had the severe mien of all-knowing youth.

Sergeant Bunce, like the majority of habitual "belly-achers" in the service, took water when he was being "crawled" by a superior.

"The lieutenant didn't understand," he mumbled. "I didn't mean nothing wrong, sir. I was speaking of man for man, outside the army."

"Outside the army! It happens you're in the army." The lieutenant threw down his rod. He flung off his natty forage cap, peeled his flannel shirt over his head and tossed that aside also. "There goes Lieutenant Ramson," he said. "Now we're on the level. You claim you're the better man? Put up your fists and prove it. Fair play, you other men."

He stepped smartly forward. With body stripped to tight undershirt he was revealed as lithe, sinewy and hard. Peters, bare from the waist up, while his own shirt dried, was soft and thick in comparison.

Peters hesitated.

"What are you waiting for?" The lieutenant laughed teasingly. "This? Look out!" His left hand shot out; he lightly slapped Peters across the jaw. "Whip me if you can. Use your fists."

The blow stung. Peters saw red. With a

bellow and an oath he rushed, swinging lustily. The exchanges were rapid, but that slim, grimly gay figure ever danced before him, yielding not an inch and rocking him with staccato blows from remarkably long arms and bullet-like fists. He never got inside the guard for close Bowery in-fighting.

"Come on, Peters; come on," the lieutenant mocked. "If you're the better man, keep coming. One round, you said. Do you know any other way to prove up?"

Three times Peters went down; the third time he stayed, breathless and bloody. Slightly panting, the lieutenant stood over.

"How about it, Peters? Got enough? Want to call quits?"

"I got enough," Peters snuffled.

The lieutenant obligingly helped him to his feet—"All right?"—and turned to resume his shirt. There was a pound of galloping hoofs. The orderly trumpeter bore in, reined short, vented one astonished look upon the arena, only to lapse impassive, hurriedly dismount, salute the waiting officer, and report.

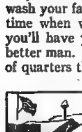
"The colonel's compliments, sir, and he would like to see the lieutenant at once."

"Very well, orderly." The lieutenant pulled on his shirt, clapped on his cap and picked up his rod. "You'd better bathe your face, Peters. Hope you understand now that as a man I don't have to take refuge across any chalk line. As an officer I've a right to impose authority."

With that he went on, walking hastily.

"B' golly, he give you a lamp to remember him by, Peters. Sure, he handles his fists like a Taps at long roll," proffered somebody.

"How can an enlisted man fight an officer?" Bunce defended. "Tell me that. Had the lad whipped him 'twould have been the guard-house and court-martial; yes, and when Old Four Fingers learned the damage done his pretty boy he'd make it hard labor and a bob-tail. That's what takes the guts out, the thought of that. All right, Peters; wash your face, as he says, and mebbe sometime when we're clean clear of chalk lines you'll have you chance to prove who's the better man. 'Tis not a knock-down in sight of quarters that turns the trick for him."



SOON they were on the way back to the post; but even before they trudged into barracks they were apprized of events suddenly pending. White skirts of women fluttered along the Line, emerging from or entering those home doors of Officers' Row like bewildered birds sensing a storm. Messengers were bustling to and from headquarters, and across the Parade. The clicking of the telegraph key sounded unusually brisk, and there was the adjutant, with a sheaf of slips in his hand, making for the operator's den adjacent to his own.

Suds Row, the precincts of the enlisted men's families, betrayed gazing figures, arms akimbo. Lieutenant Ramson, strode along in regulation fatigue, his saber buckled on, walking a few steps with First Sergeant Madigan, as if delivering final instructions. Now the old sergeant hot-footed on to troop quarters; his guise ominous.

The lounging, staring men, both cavalry and infantry, knew what was coming. Many a sapient eye had witnessed the post operator bolt from his open doorway and enter the adjutant's office, a sheet of buff paper in his fingers; and the adjutant had paced straight to post headquarters, the two-story house at the end of the Line, where the C. O. should be found. The orderly trumpeter had been summoned in from the front porch, had dashed out again, had mounted and spurred away, for the creek, as if seeking somebody. He had returned with Lieutenant Ramson; and the lieutenant, after changing with miraculous speed to proper uniform, had been closeted with the colonel. Issuing from that conference he had shouted, in his vigorous, compelling voice, for Madigan and had given his orders.

"There'll be no parade, this evenin'; an' no Retrate for us, lads," Madigan panted. "'Tis Boots an' Saddles, immejitly after supper." The veteran sergeant's granite visage was all in a pucker of anticipation. "The domn' Sioux are off the reservation an' we're to head 'em in. You, Bunce!—where's that Corp'ral Jones? An' you, Smith! Here! All o' yez, see to it, now, that not a strap or a buckle is missin' in the troop; forty rounds o' carbine, an' twinty rounds o' revolver; saddle rations. We'll be trav'lin' light. Get busy."

The men ran, with a cheer. The Sioux were out! It is strange how news races through an army post, especially when it is grave news. Those people of the frontier posts were quickest of all to read the air—and the women and the enlisted men quickest of these; the first in anxiety, the second in joy, when the news presaged the General or Boots and Saddles.

Stripling Lieutenant Ramson had found the colonel sitting behind his official table, his bronzed countenance perplexed and sober. There was prompt salute, and soldierly attention.

"Oh, yes, Lieutenant. A despatch just received from Cheyenne, forwarded through from the agency, says that the Sioux under Big Road have left the reservation and are cutting through for the Tongue and Powder country, presumably to join Sitting Bull. We're to head them off. They've got a good start, thanks to the agency people, who delay till the last moment before notifying the military. The despatch says fifty or seventy-five; that means a hundred and more. Bent is still sick. That puts you in command of the troop. I can spare only one troop, now; the other I'll have to hold for further developments. But I may follow you with the infantry. You will therefore take your troop, set out at the earliest possible, and get in ahead of the Indians at the crossing of the Medicine Fork. They'll hit the crossing sometime to-morrow, according to calculations."

"Yes, sir," said the lieutenant.

"Take only what ammunition and rations the men can carry. How many men have you?"

"Fifty-three, sir."

"Very well. Those reds must be stopped at the Crossing. They're probably aiming for Bison Pass. Once they get over the range there they'll have a clear way and the settlers will suffer. What time do you start?"

"By seven o'clock, sir. As soon as the troop's been inspected and the men will have had their supper, sir. That is, if there's no objection."

"Good. That gives you an hour and a half. Retreat Parade is dispensed with. Your troop is dismissed from all duty except that of getting away." The colonel's face softened; he dropped his professional crispness. "I could send the other troop, Douglas, but I prefer not to, yet. I promised your father to give you a chance. We have every confidence in you. He's not here to see you start. He left an hour ago, by ambulance."

"For Fort Hastings, sir?"

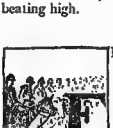
"Yes. Up the Crazy Woman, and over, by the old trail. Luckily he'll be well out the way of the Indians. You should reach the Crossing before mid-morning to-morrow. If the Indians have not preceded you—and I don't see how they can—take position and wait for them. I think a show of force will turn them. Start them back, under your escort; hold them, anyway. If you need assistance get a courier through to me. If they have beaten you to the Crossing and are ahead of you to the Pass in greatly superior force, notify me by courier and you can push on just enough to keep in touch with them, but avoid an engagement until you receive further orders, for they will certainly lead you into an ambuscade. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'll take Bat with you. And if you're in doubt what to do, don't hesitate to advise with Madigan. He's an old campaigner. I've many a time accepted the counsel of my first sergeant, when I was lieutenant and captain." The colonel rose and extended his hand. "So good luck, if I don't see you again before you leave."

They shook hands. The lieutenant stiffened to salute; he hurried out, his heart beating high.

II



REVERENTLY envied by Troop A and the infantry, in the fading twilight C Troop formed for final inspection. The colonel did not come down. 'Twas best that the troop commander be thrown upon his own responsibilities. Almost an hour ago, without the usual ceremony the garrison flag had slipped down its pole, into waiting arms, at the sound of the sunset gun punctuating the last note of the sweetly bugled Retreat. Now from across the Parade the post officers and women were watching; in front of Suds Row the figure of Sergeant Madigan's good wife stood out, ostensibly emotionless, for this was not the first time that Pat had marched away.

The lieutenant drew saber.

"Prepare to mount! Mount!"

The troopers swung into saddle like one man.

"Fours right—ma-a-a-arch!" The long articulated command, merged into the lilt of the bugle, echoed through the still air. With the lieutenant at their head, and beside him the guide Baptiste Garnier, Little Bat to distinguish him from Baptiste Pourrier who was Big Bat the troop rode from the post, followed by a cheer.

Glancing back the lieutenant glimpsed the colonel's hand raised in encouraging gesture, and the flourished apron of Mrs. Madigan, God-speeding her liege. In the post there remained Troop A, and E Company of the Eighteenth Infantry.

Once out of sight from the post he broke the march into column of twos. At walk, trot, walk, trot, the fifty-three men, officer and guide, pressed on, while the stars twinkled ever more brightly. Before Tattoo had gone

the great lone land of gravel and sage, plain and valley and hill and butte had darkened into night.

Clink, clink, of tin cup and canteen; *creak, creak*, of saddle leather and carbine holster. The double file steadily rode into the north. The men occasionally talked, comrade to comrade, in low tone. The word had quickly spread that the Indians were in force unknown; and there were minds which debated as to how this shave-tail officer would show up in emergency. Had he fought Indians before? Never!

"Grand tactics, he said," Sergeant Bunce had experssed it as they left barracks. "What do the Injuns care about grand tactics? The only tactics they use is to get your hair and get it where it grows. There'll be no chalk line out yonder; eh, Peters? Sixty rounds o' ball and the man to deliver 'em is what counts. We'll see who's the better man, now: the daddy son of some old coffee cooler, and his West Point idees, or the dog-robber like you and me, and his thimble belt."

The lieutenant briefly dropped back to speak with Madigan.

"There'll be no bugle signals after this, Sergeant, except in action. When we make camp, just quietly pass the word to halt."

"Yis, sorr. An' silent orders, in case. I understand, sorr," Pat answered approvingly.

Camp was made at midnight upon the bank of a little stream. The animals were watered the picket rope stretched and the mounts tethered to it; guards were posted; the men rolled in their blankets for three hours' sleep.

According to Little Bat the crossing of the Medicine Fork was thirty miles. Lying and looking up at the stars the lieutenant reflected that he was due to arrive with his command in good time and in good condition. Responsibility nagged him. He knew that he was being tried out; he knew that there were those malcontents in the troop, weighing him, critical of him, and resentful of his immature authority and of dependence upon it. But these were days not only of depleted muster rolls, but of commissioned and non-commissioned personnel depleted also. He was not the first officer without bars to command a company in the field.

Madigan he could trust implicitly. Madigan had been a tower of strength, and the interval between them was very small, being merely a matter of regulations tempered by those customs of the service which sanctioned a troop commander's taking the respectful indirect advice of some old reliable steady of a top sergeant. That was Madigan—of thirty-five years in the uniform, and of experience from Mexico to the Yellowstone.

Young Lieutenant Ramson smiled to himself as he thought of his fight with Peters. He should have scored by that. It rather suited him; he had seized the opportunity to show his true mettle. Better man, eh? He had been asked to step across the chalk line, and he had done so. But now he was one man, again, among fifty-three; his shoulder straps were no warrant to the troop. The troop would prefer to follow the chevrons of old Pat; and so would he, but he would not confess it.

The lives of fifty-three men hung upon the nerve and judgment of him, one man, their officer, proven their physical peer but not, to date, their mental or moral superior. That was what it had to be: not the boxer's trick of the fists, but horse sense coupled with stamina, morale— in round language, guts.

Withal, he felt a nervousness for his father. The ambulance—or stage used by officers—traveling from post to post—and small escort should be up the Crazy Woman before this, well beyond the range of the reds—that is if they had taken the shorter route to Hastings. God grant that they had. He loved and admired his father. Old Major Ramson had been a fighter, too, in his day, before his disability for field duty had relegated him to departmental quartermaster detail and increased his girth. A dragoon, the major, of the older army school when spread-eagling and the lash were more in vogue. But a soldier, albeit of short wind and temper.

He really ought not to have jumped Peters quite so forcibly. A stare and a good crawling would have answered, for the fellow was green. The set-to at the creek had been, the lieutenant honestly acknowledged to himself, a sort of sop to Peters; a covert apology, and an attempt at satisfaction—the son offering himself in lieu of the father, with no chalk line barrier.

The lieutenant was wakened by a hand upon his blanketed shoulder, and a voice in his ear.

"The lift'nant told me to wake him at three o'clock," Madigan was saying.

"Very well." The lieutenant threw off his blanket. "Turn the men out, Sergeant. No noise. Saddle up. What's that? Coffee?"

"Yis, sorr." Madigan proffered the steaming cup. "Beggin' the lift'nant's pardon, but there's been a bit of a fire built where it can't be sane, an' the men are after havin' a hot swig. Sure, it'll do no harm to start on wid a warm belly, sorr, if the lift'nant don't mind."

"Good, Madigan. But saddle up."

In column of twos they rode again, guided by Little Bat. The pace was necessarily methodical, to save the horses. The colonel had merely said "before mid-morning."

HE eastern horizon paled. Coyotes upon homeward trot into the hills exchanged final yappy reports. The dawn broadened. Birds twittered querulously in the brush. Rabbits with full stomachs hopped aside from the ambling hoofs. The distant mountain peaks were brightly pink and white, signaling of the sun. The rough, rolling lower country was revealed more and more. The sun was two hours high and it was eight o'clock when, at a grunt from Bat, Lieutenant Ramson signed "Halt."

Taking the trumpeter he rode on with the guide; half-way up the grassy ridge they both left their horses to the orderly and continued afoot—plodding, then crouching, at the last crawling, until, flat, heads bared, they peered over.

Before and below nothing moved except the bluely rippling Medicine Fork, as it meandered between sodded and willowed banks upon its course through the wide valley. The valley lay all peaceful, singularly void of life; and the Crossing, where the banks shelved down, was plain in view.

Travel would come in by that dip in the rampart hills across yonder; would go out by the break at the end of the ridge whence officer and guide were surveying. The lieutenant squinted long through his glasses.

"They haven't crossed yet, you think, Bat?"

"I teenk not. Mebbe I go see. You wait."

So Little Bat scuttled back, mounted, and galloped under cover to round the ridge and cut the trail. He returned with free bridle thong, and snaked up again.

"Nobody," he said. "We here fust. Purty soon dey come, I teenk."

"Stay where we are, Bat. Or do you know of a better place?"

"No. Dees a good place."

"All right." The lieutenant descended to the trumpeter. "Tell Sergeant Madigan to hold the troop about where it is, in sight from this ridge. The men can dismount, loosen cinches, and let the horses be grazing on the bridle reins or the picket ropes. They can breakfast on cold rations. No fire. Tell the sergeant to keep his eye on me, and at first sign to mount the troop and form column while I am coming down."

"Yes, sir."

"Wait a moment." The lieutenant hung his belt and saber upon the saddle, and fished a handfull of hard tack from a saddle pocket. "Take my horse with you and have him grazed."

"Yes, sir."

The lieutenant rejoined Bat and munched hardtack and drew sparingly upon his canteen, now and then scanning the farther slope with his glasses.

Time passed. In his rear, below, the troopers were lounging at ease upon the sward of the draw, a blue nucleus limned against the brown sundried grasses. Their horses dozed. But whenever he focused upon them, he saw the ruddy face of the old sergeant watching him, as if invoking action.

Ten o'clock arrived, and still nothing ominous had infringed upon the peace of the Valley of the Medicine. It was hard waiting. Even Bat waxed restive. The plan had been very simple: at the appearance of the dusky, garish column debouching from those hills and pouring down for the river he was to trot his troop around the ridge, under cover, and oppose the crossing; then herd the reds with his carbines if they would listen to reason or yield to force, and turn them back while he sent his courier to the post. If they determined upon fight, give them the fight—they never could win the ford, and the infantry was on the way. But he asked no help from the doughboys.

Now, where were the reds?

"Could they have slipped by us, Bat?"

"I dunno. Mebbe so. I teenk I go see."

"Where?"

"Down river. Back in two hour. You wait."

Forthwith Bat ran down to his patient pony, vaulted aboard, and at gallop scoured away on circuit back from the river, into the east. He disappeared among the rises.

The sun beat hotly upon the ridge and upon the draw. Doubtless the men were casting wistful side glances at the cool willows along the river where the upper end of the draw opened. Noon was hovering in the zenith. The trumpeter came toiling up the slope. The lieutenant edged down far enough to keep him from topping the ridge.

"What is it, Johnson?"

"Sergeant Madigan's respects, sir, and he would make bold to ask if there are any orders."

"No, other than what he already has. The troop will remain as it is."

"Yes, sir."

The sun passed the noon mark. Great Scott, where was Bat? At last he came, pelting in by back trail from the river; swiftly he dismounted, left his pony and hastened up.

"No come dees way now. Dey cross by nodder way."

"What!"

"Ten, fifteen mile down. Beeg trail. Ponies, lodge-poles too. I teenk two hunder. Made t'ree hour ago. Where buffalo used to cross. Now dey gone on. Yep."

"But we saw no sign—no dust."

"All grass; ground hard. No could see. Many hills."

"Where are they heading?"

"Dey go through Crow Gap. Nobody stop 'em dere."

"How far is that from the river?"

"Twenty—t'irty mile."

The lieutenant's mind acted rapidly. Three hours' start of him; practically five hours' start of him before he could strike the trail. Bat always underestimated distances, but they would be nearing the Gap—he could overtake them only on fagged horses. His instructions were to hold this Crossing until further orders; or, if the Indians already had crossed here, to send a courier back and follow cautiously, avoiding a fight. Obviously, it was now up to him to get word of this new situation to headquarters at once and to keep his troop in fettle while awaiting the answer. Confound the luck!

"One wagon, four soldier, too," Bat commented, breaking into this train of reasoning. "Dey camp. Den go on six hour ago. Injun ketch 'em, mebbe."

"What's that?" The lieutenant's voice rang sharply as he whirled about, head lifted.

"One wagon, four soldier. Six hour ago. Injun follow. Ketch 'em sure."

"Soldier wagon?" The tracks might tell.

"Yep. Four hosses, little wheels—so wide."

Narrow tires! The ambulance and escort! His father! It could be no other. But what was the outfit doing there, miles above the Crazy Woman? No matter. The Indians had seen, the trails coincided, and the fiends would be hot after it—would overtake it in due time; the four tired mules could not possibly outstrip the lightly riding warriors.

"Come on, quick!" The lieutenant sprang to his feet and went running down the hill. As he ran his soldier heart thrilled; for Madigan had noted, had sensed and the men were tugging at the cinches. They leaped into the saddles; the troop formed column of fours, and Madigan, leading the lieutenant's horse issued at gallop to meet him.

"The Injuns, sorr?"

"Not yet. They've crossed below." The lieutenant buckled on his saber with fingers that trembled, and swung into his seat. For a moment he checked his horse. "They're aiming for Crow Gap, Bat says. He thinks two hundred. It must be the same band. They crossed about nine o'clock, by the sign. My instructions are to hold this Crossing; or, if they're ahead of me, to send a courier back and to follow on just enough to keep in touch. They're not strictly ahead of me, Pat; they're not going by way of Bison Pass—but, by the Eternal, my father and the ambulance are only three hours ahead of *them!*"

"Not there, sorr?"

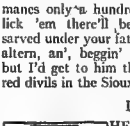
"Yes. No doubt about it, by the tracks. He was supposed to take the Crazy Woman trail for Hastings. He didn't. Now speak your mind, one soldier to another."

"Shure," muttered Pat, "they guissed the longer way 'round'd be the shortest way in. That Crazy Woman 's a hard road." He gazed appealingly, and there was quick eagerness in his tone. "We'll be takin' after, sorr? We'll not be waitin' here—we'll be takin' after, an' ketchin' them divils whilst they're ketchin' him?"

"Yes." The lieutenant's West Point mind jumped the rigid groove of "Obey Orders." "It may mean court-martial, but I'm going." He jerked out his field notebook and scribbled "I'll want a courier," he added.

"I wouldn't be speakin' for the lift'nant," Pat volunteered, "but domn the court-martial. Two hundred, you say? That manes only a hundred bucks. Sure, if we lick 'em there'll be no court-martial; I sarved under your father when he was a subaltern, an', beggin' the lift'nant's pardon, but I'd get to him through hell, an' all the red divils in the Sioux nation."

III



THE lieutenant had written his despatch and read it over before folding it up:

Crossing of Medicine Fork,
Sept. 16, noon.

C. O.
Fort Ritchie.

Sir:

After taking position here at 8 A. M. I finally learned through the guide that the Indians numbering 200 had crossed fifteen miles below me, heading for Crow Gap. The ambulance of Major Ramson of the Quartermaster Dep't. appears to have preceded them by about three hours. I

am accordingly following upon the trail at once and shall bring them to a stand if possible.

Respectfully,

D. G. Ramson,
2nd. Lt., C'm'd'g Troop C.

"A man to carry this back, Sergeant," he ordered.

Together they arrived at the troop, which had been gazing expectantly. The sergeant beckoned with brusk forefinger.

"You, Peters. Here wid you!"

The files opened and Private Peters emerged, his blackened eye prominent.

"You will deliver this despatch into the hands of the commanding officer at Fort Ritchie without delay," the lieutenant ordered. "Don't spare your horse."

"I'd rather not, sir," said Peters, who had been forewarned by sight of the paper.

"What! You're afraid?"

"I don't know the road," Peters mumbled sullkily. "I never been out this way, sir."

"You refuse to obey orders?"

"A coward in the troop!" the old sergeant blared, his face a fury. "The road, he says? An' the road plain? You obey the lift'nant's orders, or——"

"That will do, Sergeant," the lieutenant rapped. He keenly surveyed the sulky Peters, of the black eye. The man had taken punishment. His attitude puzzled. If he were a coward, the despatch should not be entrusted to him—and there was no time now for setting up the screws of discipline. "Another man, Sergeant. Quick! As for you, Peters—you had fight enough, once, I think. You've gained nothing by refusing duty. Now you're going into a bigger fight. There'll be eyes watching you, my man. Return to your place."

The courier tore away with the despatch.

"Column, for'd—march!" the lieutenant ordered.

"By twos—trot! March!"

The double file of troopers jogged rapidly down the draw.

"Strike that trail by the shortest route, Bat," the lieutenant directed.

The column rounded the end of the ridge, into near view of the river and of the Crossing. The anxiously peering eyes saw no sign of enemy. At steady trot the march proceeded until, as Bat's miles lengthened out, brief lapses into a walk were necessary, and once a halt when the horses demanded water. Now in the open of the valley, now by detour among the engirding hills; it was three o'clock when, two miles back from the river, the column struck the trail at last.

Bat and the lieutenant reined their horses, and at their officer's signal the troopers reined likewise. The trail, stretching straight away into the north, was clear for every man to see: a broad, defiant trail of pony hoofs and a few lodge-pole travois scarring the turf.

The lieutenant's gaze leaped to the wagon-wheel tracks, not all obliterated. He beckoned Madigan forward.

"There it is, Pat."

Sergeant Madigan squinted earnestly.

"Yis, sorr. An' how far ahead would they be, sorr?"

"Five hours; maybe six. They'll be at the Gap soon. What do you think, Bat?"

"I teenk mebbe dey camp dees night up the Gap, to look over an' see if sojers on odder side. Travel slow. Got women an' travois."

"The ambulance will camp, too, and travel slowly. Up-hill going."

"The troops from Hastings will likely be out, sorr," the old sergeant said. "They'll cut in an' we'll get thim red imps betwixt two fires."

"No. Hastings has no telegraph. I doubt if it's been notified in time. This is our job. We've got to save the horses—go as far as we can, and if those fellows are still in the Gap, clean 'em out before they break camp in the morning. Or else overhaul 'em on the other side. The ambulance will make a fight. We've a chance. Put the troop in motion, Sergeant; at trot."

The troop again filed in among the hills. There was not so much alacrity now, for the horses were showing signs of wear, the men were empty from short rations, and the trail was grim with potentialities. Crow Gap dimly revealed itself in the distance, and heightened very slowly. If spies had been keeping tab from the rises they evaded the lieutenant's glasses and the sharp eyes of Bat.

The sun sank lower. Shortly before six o'clock the lieutenant signaled Halt! The trail had been growing fresher. This indicated that the Indians were traveling at ease, confident that they had given the troops the slip. Now all Ramson's being was hot and cold with the thought that the ambulance—that his father—was probably making camp, too, somewhere beyond the Gap but far short of Hastings; that the swiftly riding Sioux, having reconnoitered, would strive to ring him about, in the morning, with the circle of death.

So Lieutenant Ramson's heart cried to him to press on, right on, at any hazard; circumvent the Indians if he could, cleave through them if he could not circumvent. But first

he must locate them. He prayed that they would be in the Gap. The pass of the Gap was six miles ahead, yet a long six miles for weary horses. He dared not risk blind pursuit with a wearied outfit in the darkening hills.

The troop off-saddled here in the grassy little basin watered by a cold stream. The mounts were picketed, gladly to plunge their noses into the grain bags; the men messed amid the gathering dusk. Silence, sombre and brooding, reigned in the camp. The hills threatened, and the men talked low.

The indefatigable Bat set off, to investigate the Gap. The lieutenant, lying apart, waiting the scout's return, curbed his impatience with fitful dozes. And Sergeant Bunce concluded those covert voicings of his opinion, with which he favored Peters and other cronies.

"Two hundred reds, and here are we, half a hundred, heading straight into a fight, with one officer, and him green to Injuns. 'Tain't orders, I'll bet a month's pay. And for why, then? Everyone knows; it's to chance saving the hide of old Four Fingers. If 'twarn't for the poor boys with him, I'd say let him go. But it's a rum show we have of ever seeing quarters again. You ought to have carried that despatch, Peters, and saved your own hide."

"I didn't come to carry despatches back," retorted Peters. "I'll stay and see it through with the troop."

"Out where there's no chalk line, eh?" the sergeant bantered maliciously. "You had your taste of it. Well, lemme tell you he'll make you walk chalk if ever him and you do get back. It's the file of bayonets and the Rogue's March for you, my buck."

"Quit that talkin', there!" The gruff bark from Madigan quieted the discussion and left Recruit Peters to his poignant thoughts.

Bat returned. The lieutenant heard the cautious challenge of a guard. By his watch it was eleven o'clock.

"Dey camp, jes' as I teenk, 'way up at head of Gap," Bat reported. "Good place to see from. Go on early in mornin'. Mebbe leave squaws while warriors ketch wagon an' sojers."

"How far from here?"

"Ten-twelve miles, to head of Gap."

"Is there a trail around them?"

"Bad in dark. Take long time. Better wait till can see. No so much noise den."

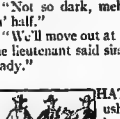
"Madigan!" called the lieutenant. The sergeant had been alert also. He came over quickly.

"Yis, sorr. Are they there?"

"Yes. We'll move out. How long will it take to get around from the foot of the Gap to the head, Bat?"

"Not so dark, mebbe hour, mebbe hour an' half."

"We'll move out at two o'clock, Sergeant," the lieutenant said simply. "Have the men ready."



HAT false dawn which only ushers on the true dawn had slightly paled the brush when the column made next halt at the foot of Crow Gap. The pass, misty and vague, led on in a course ascending and rocky, flanked by the somnolent slopes.

"You will take half the troop, Sergeant, or six squads, and make detour by the left for the head of the Gap," the lieutenant directed Madigan. "Bat will guide you. Post your detachment ready to strike across the trail and hold the Indians in case they attempt to get away. I am going straight in, keeping to the right. Bat will join me, for I'll need him as interpreter. When you hear the Rally sounded show yourself promptly, and we'll see," with a boyish smile, "if we can't put over a good bluff. At least, we can stand 'em off and keep them from the ambulance, if they're bound to fight. But don't start an engagement. You're merely to support me."

"I understand, sorr." Sergeant Pat hesitated, and gulped. "If I could only have stayed wid the lift'nant—— Beggin' your pardon, sorr, but I've known ye from a boy, an' ye'll go slow, sorr, feelin' your way? It's like to be an ugly job."

"I'll go slow, Pat. I'll give you an hour and a half."

"All right, sorr. I've me orders to wait the bugle, but at the first crack of a muzzle I'll be comin', wid the men behind me."

The sergeant rode on with his squads and Bat. The remaining men sat at ease, but nagged by the wait. In due time the lieutenant signaled Forward. They advanced at walk. They proceeded, they halted, they advanced again, feeling their way, ever inclining to the right, gradually obliquing farther up the terraced slope, and at pace calculated to syncronize with the movements of the sergeant.

The mystery of utter silence cloaked the pass before, but land and sky were lightening. It was slow work, a touch and go that set the men on edge. They were, it seemed to Lieutenant Ramson, far into the pass Again he looked at his watch. His watch

told him that he should push on without delays, and the flushing east warned him that the Indian camp would soon be astir.

The horses puffed and slipped; accouterments jangled; hoofs clattered upon ledges. That would never do. He fancied that he smelled the fumes of the Indian fires. The sounds of his approach would carry to Indian ears.

In a sheltered little nook he halted once more, to speak to Third Sergeant Bunce:

"Dismount the men, Sergeant, prepared to fight on foot. Detail four as horse guard. The camp ought to be near, now." He discarded his saber belt. "I'm going ahead with the trumpeter for a look. I'll need another man as an orderly. Hold the detachment here until word from me. If Bat comes in, send him on to me. Instruct the horse guard that at call of To Horse, or at sound of firing, they are to bring the mounts at once."

"Yes, sir. You want a messenger, sir?"

"Yes; mounted."

Sergeant Bunce went to Peters. There was malicious bite in his undertone address.

"You, Peters, ride along with the lieutenant and Stripes, and say 'How' to the Injuns. No dodging, now, or you'll stay as hoss guard, and that might be wuss. You wouldn't let him be going on further than you, would you? Oh, no!"

Peters had no ready reply. He rode forward and dumbly saluted the lieutenant.

"It's you, is it, Peters?" the officer greeted curtly. "Lead your horse on at twenty paces behind the trumpeter and me and be ready to take word back to the men. Make no more noise than you can help."

Leading their horses, the lieutenant and trumpeter started, the officer first. At his interval Peters followed. They three were now filing up into the shadowed perils of this silent pass, and he felt very small, his heart thumping furiously.

The lieutenant, slim of waist, slight of figure, girt with revolver only, held steady course, weaving through amid the brush and rocks of the slope, faltering only when he slipped or paused to listen. His horse, nose outstretched to the bridle reins, cleverly picked a way after him. The trumpeter kept to their wake, his yellow stripes glimmering; and at the twenty paces Private Peters, with the sensation of being rather alone, repeated their movements.

They were gradually climbing. Much too soon they had left Sergeant Bunce and the little platoon out of sight, but the lieutenant continued.

The sky heralded sunrise. It seemed to Private Peters they had been stealing onward a long time. How much farther now? He thought of a number of things. "The Rogue's March," Bunce had said; "The Rogue's March" if ever they got back to the post, where the lieutenant would make him walk chalk on account of that despatch business. A drumming out of the service, and lasting disgrace. Well, he hadn't come to be sent home with despatches; he'd come—he'd come to stick to the finish. The lieutenant had blacked his eye, but that didn't prove yet that shoulder-straps made the better man. Not by a blamed sight!

It would be hard to be drummed out. . . . Of course, if the lieutenant were killed on this trip there'd probably be no report turned in then. But he couldn't say that he wished the lieutenant killed, and he didn't imagine for more than a second that by detailing him, with a sneer, to follow on in support, the sergeant had wished the lieutenant killed. The troop might consider him a coward, reflected Private Peters, but now let the shoulder-straps toll on as far as he liked and prove the better man if he could.

Smoke surely tinged the still air. Faint sounds surely broke the peace, at vague distance ahead. Would the lieutenant never stop and bid the platoon come up? Private Peters fancied that he heard sly rustlings; his horse pricked ears, shied back upon the bridle reins, and blew through nervous nostrils. A chill terror prickled Peters, as if he were being stalked by a creeping varmint which waited only an opportunity to pounce.

The pass was misty, its secrets profound; but the rims were bright and clear with day. The lieutenant had veered pretty well up, now; the platoon seemed miles behind. He stopped short, passed the lines of his horse to the trumpeter, and crawled on, over a little shoulder of the slope. He peered through his glasses, and then without them.

Peters's interval had widened, somehow; so he went in, and in, his heart in his throat, and his hand itching to drag his carbine from its boot. The carbine in his grasp would have been comforting. The lieutenant turned and beckoned to him and wormed backward a trifle. When Peters arrived at the trumpeter he got the word, spoken cautiously out of lips compressed in face taut.

"Lead your horse a short distance. Then mount. Tell Bunce to bring the men on, afoot, at once; horses to follow at signal. Hurry!"

The upper outlet of the Gap was apparently near; smoke did hover, beyond; the three horses were restless. Peters back-tracked but not for long in those slow boots; he had

a great urge to find company, and so had his horse. Therefore he swung into the saddle, cast one glance rearward, witnessed the lieutenant and the trumpeter still in position, tightened rein and forged on through the brush, making more and more rapidly down toward the Bunce platoon.

LIKE the burst of an exploded magazine all the pass suddenly shuddered and shook to ringing gunshot and whoop and yell. Peters tried to draw his carbine and control his bolting mount at the same time. His heart almost leaped from his throat. The Sioux had attacked. Was it Madigan? Was it the lieutenant? The gunshots echoed near; he heard the stilled first notes of To Horse. From far up the head of the pass there drifted a soldier cheer; now a ball hummed by him, and another, the pandemonium thickened—it appeared to be approaching, and he was here alone. Then, while in a panic of uncertainty, he reined and spurred at the same time, a mounted figure came crashing toward him. It was Stripes the trumpeter, bloody, capless, hanging hard to the pommel of his saddle of his wounded runaway horse.

Peters succeeded in wheeling about. Down toppled the trumpeter; on tore the horse, leaving him dead, his bugle crushed beneath him. But where was the lieutenant? Alive? Disabled? Dead? It had been a surprise, but Madigan was fighting; Bunce would be racing in. The lieutenant would never be abandoned—yet the fate of Stripes was ghastly! What should he, Peters do? There above the din, came the heavy, repeated bark of the lieutenant's Colt. He was alive and fighting.

At this, Trooper Peters saw red. He uttered a round oath, like a vow. Was the better man in there, or out here? Fiercely he jabbed his plunging horse and rode for the melee.

Lead hissed and pattered about him. Tawny painted forms careened on right and left, leveling arrow and gun. His busy carbine sent them dodging, and again he charged on, crashing through the brush, his body bent forward, his heels hammering his mount.

A bullet seared his scalp and flicked his cap from his head; for a moment he reeled, but he kept to his seat. His horse stumbled to its knees, but he lifted it again, and cursed it savagely. Would he never arrive? The Colt was still occasionally speaking. His carbine was hot, his one good eye was dazed, and the tumult before, behind, half deafened him; but he located the lieutenant and, firing, bored on.

The lieutenant was at bay, lying flat behind his dead horse, in the bushes below. His revolver now and again spurted smoke at those other spurts ringing him about. Trooper Peters rammed his carbine into the boot, and, snatching his own revolver from the saddle holster, with a wild shout he plunged down, straight in, firing again to clear passage. He had a glimpse of swerving Indians; all the air about him was rent with angry missiles. Just short of the goal his horse winced, staggered, groaned, sprawled forward nose first, pitching him on. With a quick turn he managed to jerk the carbine free and in the next instant he had dived over beside Lieutenant Ramson, where he began to sweep the rocks and brush.

For a moment a maelstrom of lead and arrows had flooded the paltry defenses. It slackened; the fire waned as in sheer astonishment and warriors ran scuttling, fearful of reverse. The lieutenant glanced briefly aside. His tense face was sweat-grimed, scratched and bleeding, and his blue eyes shone like wintry planets, cold but burning.

"What are you doing here? I sent you back."

"Yes, sir," Peters panted. "I didn't get there."

"Where's that platoon?"

"I don't know, sir. It'll be coming."

The rattle of carbine shots, the cheering, the crack of Winchester, the bang of musket and the excited whoops, even the shrill screams of squaws, were in the confusion on up the pass. That was Sergeant Madigan hotly engaged. Down the pass there was comparative quiet, although Peters strained his ears for sounds heralding the onrush by the platoon. Before them the Indians were now quiet.

Madigan appeared to be gaining way. Indian forms were dashing back and forth, on up the pass; other forms, from hereabouts, were flitting to join them. Where was Bunce?

"My leg is broken and I'm shot through the right arm" the lieutenant said sharply. "You'll have to make a run for it. Never mind me. Go down-hill; they'll over-shoot. Get into that creek bed if you can, find Bunce, tell him to deploy——"

"No, sir! I stay here till they come. Either both of us get into that creek bed or neither of us does."

"Look out!"

Arrow and ball pelted in; together they answered. The horse carcass quivered; the

lieutenant's temple flowed redly from a grazing shaft; Peters's left shoulder stung to a flesh wound; the smoke swirled densely. The turmoil above had increased; and now from the opposite direction a cheer welled. The platoon was coming!

"Madigan'll be driving the Injuns right into us, sir," Peters gasped. "We'll have to break for below."

"By hell, I order you to leave me and find Bunce."

"By hell, I won't!" Peters retorted. "There's no chalk line here and I'm as good a man as you are. Once down in that creek and we can hold 'em off."

The lieutenant writhed impotently, his face flushed.

"You're a fool," he said—but not unkindly. "You've a chance to save yourself; you can travel. I'm a goner. Get out. Tell Bunce——"

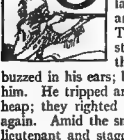
A fusilade interrupted them. It was evident that only a smattering of the enemy were posted here, corraling them, while the bulk fought Madigan or raced to check the new threat, signaled by the swelling din in the south.

Peters sowed more bullets, all in the one direction.

"I've cleaned the road there," he rasped. "Now, sir, quick. Pickaback—your arm round my neck——"

"You can't do it, man!"

"I will."



CARRYING carbine in one hand, ready revolver in the other, the lieutenant fast to his back but with arm and leg dangling, Trooper Peters lurched, staggering, down through the brush. The hornets buzzed in his ears; blood and sweat blinded him. He tripped and they went down in a heap; they righted and fired, again, again, again. Amid the smoke he grabbed up the lieutenant and staggered on, down through the brush, through the yells, through the missiles. Twigs flew, pebbles spattered. A form leaped upon him; he dropped the lieutenant and met it with snap shot of revolver, and the form crumpled.

Crouched, he glared about, panting. The uproar in the pass was diabolical, the battle at full height, enlisting every man. He picked up the lieutenant, now lax in his embrace, and hastened, sliding, staggering, on and down. A glance behind showed him the spot of the horse-carcass fort being trampled under foot and hoof by the red warriors.

Bullets whined by him, but he reached the dried creek bed and laid the lieutenant in a bouldered niche. He was sick and dizzy; the lieutenant, he saw, had fainted. If the Indians poured this way—— Well, his cartridge belt was limp, the lieutenant's belt held only a dozen revolver loads. But, by thunder, he had done his best. Who said chalk line? What did that prove, or a round of fists and a black eye, either? Coward, did they think him? Well, there they were, together, and here were only he and the lieutenant. Yes, and the lieutenant was a good man, a mighty good man no matter on which side of the chalk line he stood; but now neither he nor anybody else would have the call to say that he was the better man when it came to a show-down, man and man.

Off yonder, down the pass, on that right-hand slope which the lieutenant and Stripes and Peters had followed, carbines were now whanging more lustily; smoke belched. Bunce's platoon was making in! A thin blue line of men—only a skeleton platoon under a third sergeant, but troopers all—kneeling, firing, darting forward, kneeling and firing again, they worked slowly onward in widely extended order to cover the upper half of the incline.

They would miss the lieutenant and Peters entirely. But the reds wouldn't; they were bound to swing this way, either in escape or to turn Bunce's left and stampede the horses. The platoon was fighting on foot, and the horses would be at rear. A ticklish job, that, holding those horses. Good men there, too.

This spot in the creek bed was being temporarily neglected by the enemy, but Peters dared not shout, dared not wave. The lieutenant stirred feebly.

"Sound To Horse, Trumpeter! And Charge! Oh, you're here, Peters? The men are coming?"

"Yes, sir. You bet they are."

"Dismounted?"

"Yes, sir; or Bunce's platoon is."

"They should mount—they should mount! Where's that trumpeter? Tell Bunce to get up his horses, or he'll lose them. Oh!" The lieutenant fell back and sighed into another faint.

Peters sprang forward impulsively; the balls of snipers thwacked about him. One leg gave out, but he might still hobble down through the creek bed, keeping the enemy off—perhaps reach his fellows, perhaps not. That is, he could try if he were not carrying the lieutenant. But leave the lieutenant here, to the club and the knife? Never!

Then suddenly the platoon's horses appeared, led six to a man, coming on at furious

gallop, in spite of fire and brimstone! They reared, they screamed, they stumbled—they reached the fighting men, who sprang to horse and charged! The Indians broke to right and to left.

Upon the rim of the pass a bugle pealed the cavalry Charge! Down they poured, that supporting troop, revolver hands high, bridle reins shaking, full company front, silhouetted for a moment against the sky, then avalanching into the slope. Relief was here, from Ritchie, from Hastings—it mattered not whence, for they had struck at just the crest of time.

They drove the Indians, horse and foot, pellmell, straight for the bottom, while Bunce's yelling platoon took toll and Madigan's men turned the up-pass fugitives. Straight for the bottom and the west slope, it was—and straight for Peters.

He answered the cries of the cheering yellow-legs, but how could they hear? He emptied both revolvers, one in either hand. Then, as the painted mob enveloped him, he remembered only standing over the lieutenant, shielding him with his body, warding off blade and bludgeon and hasty muzzle, flailing with clubbed carbine, singed by powder blasts, giving and receiving blows, until a numbing shock wiped out sight and sound.

When Peters awoke he was saying to himself, "There ain't no chalk line here; just two good men." He was upon blankets in a field hospital tent. And next to him a voice replied, "Several good men, Peters; none better."

Peters painfully looked, and beheld the lieutenant, white of face, in blankets, and smiling quizzically again.

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Peters, from his bandages. "Did we lick 'em, sir?"

"That we did."

"And they didn't ketch the ambylance?"

"The ambulance is safe at Hastings."

"Gee!" Peters mused. "I guess that's worth the carpet and a bobtail, huh?"

"I don't think there's any carpet or bobtail waiting for us, Peters," said the lieutenant. "Quite the contrary."

"Well," Peters murmured happily, as he cogitated, "what's all that about a chalk line, then, among good men? Soldiering ain't so bad, after all; is it, sir?"

INDIAN RED PIPESTONE, OR CATLINITE

ALMOST everyone has seen the pipes of beautiful blood-red stone which are almost universally used by our North American Indians, but probably very few realize that they all come, originally, from two very restricted localities. The most brilliantly colored examples come from the great quarries at Pipestone, near Flandreau, Minnesota, first described by the traveler George Catlin, in whose honor the stone was named. They are still owned by the Sioux Indians, although, in recent years, various enterprising white men have leased the right to mine and work up the catlinite, principally for paperweights and other souvenirs. Many legends center about this quarry, and make it a neutral meeting place of the tribes, but, originally, admission to its sacred precincts was only by favor of the Sioux although, of course, other Indians sometimes slipped in and helped themselves when there were no Sioux in the neighborhood.

Technically catlinite is "a fine grained argillaceous sediment, and when freshly quarried is so soft as to be readily carved with stone knives and drilled with primitive hand drills." It soon hardens through use and exposure, however. The Sioux make great quantities of their characteristic pipes, L shaped, with a projection before the bowl as a rule, for gifts and for exchange with their neighbors. In fact the Siouxan type of pipe has become the conventional form, all over the plains and woodland, unhappily displacing the old tribal styles, except among the Blackfeet.

In recent years, Mr. Geo. A. West of Milwaukee, formerly president of the Wisconsin Archeological Society, has discovered some hitherto unknown quarries of catlinite in northern Wisconsin, which are still worked to some extent by the Ojibway Indians. The catlinite from these quarries is usually readily distinguished from that of Minnesota by its darker color and coarser texture. Pipes of this material are sometimes found among the Ojibway, Winnebago, Menomini, and perhaps other Wisconsin Indians to this day, though they are by no means abundant.

The Menomini claim that they were the only woodland Algonkian tribe whom the Eastern Sioux permitted to visit the quarries in Minnesota to obtain pipestone, and this is borne out by the Sioux themselves, who declare that the two tribes have been friendly to each other as far back as they have any tradition.—A. S.

THE SILVER SAINT OF BALIUAG

By MAGRUDER G. MAURY

Into the Luzon hills the American troops carried the white man's frontier—a frontier bitterly contested and sown with such sights as Sergeant Rider encountered on the San Fernando Road

NOON on Luzon. The hills back of the city swam in the brilliant light, shimmered, like the top of a hot stove, in the blistering heat of the sun.

Across the breast of the highest hill ran a blinding white road, ran and dipped down to cross the divide where a spur of bamboo stood guard over an ant-heap. Beside the ant-heap, arms and legs apparently flung wide in reckless abandon, lay a white man, the sun gleaming on his naked body.

Down the baked roadway came a cantering horse. The rider was a long, lithe cavalryman, his regulation blue chambray shirt wet with perspiration, wisps of red hair sticking through holes in the wide-brimmed campaign hat which he wore a little on one side of his head.

He reined his mount to an abrupt halt before the supine figure by the ant-heap.

Just for a fleeting instant he looked, then swung himself from the saddle, a white-hot oath on his slips.

The man on the ground had been spread-eagled. His eyes were naked to the blazing sun. The lids had been hacked off with a bolo. His ears lay on the ground a little away from his head on either side. His mouth was a horrid mass of clotted red where the lips had been cut away. There were other mutilations unspeakable.

The cavalryman stooped and cut the torturing bamboo withes that stretched the arms and legs as the thongs of the rack used to stretch its victims in older days. A purple bubble burst from the awful mouth as the man's breast collapsed, followed by a faint sigh of returning consciousness.

Rider poured tepid water from his canteen upon the clenched teeth. The convulsions ceased and the fearful, rolling eyes seemed to be trying to focus themselves. Then the grinning teeth parted and a scream—bitter, terrible, heart-tearing in its utter, hopeless agony—filled the air.

Rider's lips were set and his usually clear blue eyes, eyes that looked pale in the red of his sunburned face, clouded with an anguish hardly less terrible than the suffering of the man at his feet.

With a word to his horse he stood the animal where its long body made a short shadow that partially sheltered the stricken man from the sun. Then he picked up the scattered clothes which had been torn from the man before him, rolled them into a rude

pillow and, gently lifting the bloody head, placed the pillow beneath it.

"Who did it?" he asked. "Can you speak?"

Again the teeth parted and this time Rider saw that the man's tongue was gone.

"God!" said Rider. "Oh, my God!"

He stood up and looked about him. He was hours away from aid of any sort. Aid? What help was there on earth for the thing that lay there writhing and twitching before him. He envisaged the immediate future for this man, in the intervals of consciousness that might be his before the end came.

The cavalryman's lips took a tighter set, and in his eyes there blazed the pain of a tremendous resolve. His hand went to the butt of the revolver at his thigh. The horse started and snorted at the sound of a shot.

But the mutilated man on the ground quivered, sighed as one going to sleep, and lay quite still.

Then the cavalryman's head went down on his hands and he sobbed, great, tearing sobs, man sobs that racked his big frame, but left him dry-eyed. Finally he stood up, staring at the white ribbon of road as it climbed out of sight over the crest of the hill.

His horse whimpered softly and nosed him. The cavlaryman's face grew tender. He patted the horse's nose, and stooped to release the bridle, which had caught over one of the animal's feet.

A gleam of something in the dust caught his eye, and he picked up a tiny image of solid silver—the Silver Saint of Baliuag, with a broken length of silver chain dangling from a little ring in the head.

THE sentry at the outer gate of the convent saw him coming, the horse walking slowly in the heat haze under its double load. Through the gate rode the pair, the living and the dead, while the members of C Troop gathered about awe-stricken and silent.

"My God, Sergeant Rider!" It was the troop commander, Captain Galt, speaking. "What's happened?"

Rider did not turn his head. Silent, his mind far away from the hot and dusty compound, he rode through the clumps of gaping men.

The top sergeant stepped forward, hand outstretched to touch and recall the other man to duty. But the grim faced, white mustached old soldier who commanded them knew better.

"Let him alone," he said, quietly. "He'll come to presently."

Straight to the picket line rode Rider. There he dismounted, carefully steadying the body to keep it from slipping. On his feet he swayed for an instant.

"Give him a hand, some of you," Galt ordered quickly.

A dozen men bounded forward at the word. Big Woodruff and two or three others lifted the dead man from the horse.

Mechanically Sergeant Rider unsaddled his mount and led it into the shade of the old building, where he began rubbing the animal down with handfuls of hay.

"Never mind the horse, Sergeant. Some of the men will look out for him. I want you inside." This time Rider heard and recognized the voice of authority. He followed the troop commander across the compound to the entrance of the convent, and snapped to attention when Captain Galt turned at the door and said, "Wait here a moment, Sergeant."

He wanted time for the corpse-bearers to get the mutilated body out of sight. He did not want Rider to see it again.

Presently he returned and beckoned the sergeant indoors. The top sergeant was there, and Lieutenant Sterling, second in command of the troop.

"All right," said the commanding officer, with gruff kindness. "Out with it,"

Rider looked at the captain gravely, and twice tried and twice failed to make a sound beyond a guttural grunt. Then the words came with a rush.

"I found him spread-eagled beside the road just the other side of the first hill after you leave the San Fernando Road. You couldn't have missed him, sir. That's what the damn devils wanted. They wanted us to see him—that—that way." He gulped.

"He was dead when you got to him?" The captain made a question of his statement.

"No, sir. He was still alive." The words came draggingly. "When I cut the bamboo strips he seemed to come to himself a bit."

He paused, the perspiration dripping in great beads from his thick red eyebrows.

"And then—" his commanding officer prompted.

"And then I killed him, sir. I shot him."

He flung up his arms and collapsed at the captain's feet.

"All in, poor devil," said Galt, bending over the unconscious cavalryman, and waving to the others to aid in lifting the man to the bamboo bunk in the corner.

"No wonder," said the lieutenant, shud-

dering a little, for he was new to the Islands and to Island ways.

"Killed the poor, suffering, mutilated devil himself," grunted the old captain. "The fellow ought to have a Congressional medal for that." He blew his big nose violently, and added, "but if it ever gets back to the States I suppose they'd hang him for murder —the fools."

"Who did it—er—mutilated the other I mean?" asked the lieutenant.

"'Our Little Brown Brothers,'" snarled the top, who was privileged.

American soldiers do not, as a rule, hate the enemies they fight against, but the glare in the captain's eyes when the top sergeant made use of the term just then becoming widely known was anything but brotherly.

"Get the doctor here, Sergeant," he ordered.

"But who did it?" the lieutenant insisted, when the top had gone.

"Oh, del Pilar, doubtless," said the older man. "It's his favorite gambit when he gets his tail up. We'll have hell break loose shortly."

"Who is del Pilar?"

"A ladrone chief. Has a band with headquarters across the river about twelve miles from here."

"We know that, and can't touch him?" There was amazement in the young lieutenant's tone. He was very new to the Islands.

"Just so. We sit here and make them show their *cedulas*, proving that they're good American citizens, and watch the waterworks so Manila won't go thirsty; but under no circumstances must we touch a hair of their blessed heads."

"Not even in this case?" The lieutenant was plainly at sea.

"We couldn't prove a thing," growled the captain. "We'd have no actual evidence."

The doctor entered, walked to the bunk and bent over Sergeant Rider.

"Hell, ain't it?" he demanded, looking up as he prepared a dose for the still unconscious man. "Any idea who the other chap was—the one they tortured?"

"Not yet," said the captain. "Not one of our gang, so far as I know, but he's so disfigured his own father wouldn't know him."

There was silence while the doctor worked over Rider. At length he straightened up. "He'll do now," he said.

There was a little color coming back into the sergeant's face. Presently he opened his eyes and struggled to sit up.

"Feel better, eh?" asked the doctor. "That's right, but you keep quiet for a couple of days. You'd be better in a hospital."

"Oh, no, sir," protested the sergeant.

"Oh, yes, sir," grinned the doctor. "See that he keeps quiet, will you?" he said to the Top.

When the doctor had gone his patient rose from the bunk and walked toward the door to the hall. Reaching it, he faced about and saluted.

"Beg the captain's pardon, but I forgot to report. The quartermaster is sending two cartloads of the carbine cartridges to-morrow. The other things will come then, too."

"Good!" said the captain, keeping a steady eye on the cavalryman, who respectfully returned the look.

"Might I ask the commanding officer if we—if he is sending any one after the gang that did that?"

"No," said the captain. "We can't spare the men. Besides, we have orders to sit tight here, watching the pumping station. You go to your bunk and take it easy for a couple of days."

"Yes, sir." Rider saluted, turned and left the room.

In the chapel of the long abandoned convent, now being used by the troop as quarters for the enlisted men, he went to his split bamboo bunk and lay down. The men about the quarters eyed him silently and tiptoed when they came near him, as though fearful of waking him. All of them knew by this time that it was Rider's own bullet that had ended the torture of the mutilated man he'd brought in on his horse.

"Must ha' took some nerve to do it though, at that," he heard one of the men whisper.

"He'd have a hard time provin' he didn't do it all if the case went to trial," said another whose voice Rider recognized as belonging to Jim Moore, the troop pessimist.

Rider, resting on his side, stood the whispering and tiptoeing as long as he could, His wide open eyes persistently focused on everything that came within their range, as if they feared to become settled, lest they see other sights.

Presently he rose, reached for the revolver and belt he had hung at the head of his bunk when he lay down, and, taking the gun, began to clean it. He went about the work methodically, swabbing the short, ugly barrel until it gleamed as he squinted through it at the lessening light of the window.

Mess call sounded in the compound outside. Immediately the chapel was deserted, save for Rider, who continued his slow, patient cleaning of his gun. At last, as the first of the men returned from supper, the

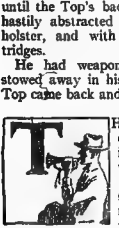
work was finished to suit him, and he thrust the weapon back into its holster.

"Want a bite of supper with me, old man?" asked the Top, who came in about that time.

Rider rose and followed the top sergeant into the orderly room, where that exalted non-com usually ate in solitary grandeur.

Very little was said during the meal, and when it was finished the Top went to the door to call the Filipino *muchacho* who served as his personal servant. His new Colt's automatic, issued to him for testing purposes, hung on the back of his chair. Rider waited until the Top's back was turned; then he hastily abstracted the automatic from its holster, and with it three clips of cartridges.

He had weapon and cartridges safely stowed away in his own pockets when the Top came back and began to talk.



THE troops went to bed early in those days and in that place. There was nothing else to do. Even before quarters sounded on the trumpet most of the men off duty were snoring in their bunks. At nine-thirty taps wailed its mournful good night.

Five minutes later Rider, unable to wait any longer, left his bunk, walked the length of the room down the narrow aisle to the compound. He was bareheaded.

Not an officer was in sight. So far as he could make out, the compound was empty except for a ghostly sentry pacing back and forth before the main gate. He knew there would be a man on guard over the picket line as well, but that fact did not trouble him. There was a fine drizzle of rain falling, so he drew on his poncho, fastened the front of it down with a light leather belt he used instead of the cumbersome web regulation affair, and walked briskly to the horse line.

Big Woodward, who had helped him that afternoon, was on post.

"Hello, Woody," said Rider.

"Hello, Serg!" came the surprised response. "What you doin' out here this time o' night?"

"Got to take a message to Manila for the Old Man," lied Rider, briefly, effectively. "Goin' to use his horse. Mine's all in from this afternoon."

"Well, ain't that rotten?" ejaculated the sentry. "You'd think they'd give you some sort of rest after today—but no. The more you do, the more they work you. Look at me. This is the fourth night this week I've been on guard. That skunk of a top sergeant's got it in for me."

Rider did not stop to talk. He went straight to the picket line where the captain's pet sorrel was standing under an improvised shelter. He felt the horse's legs while the sorrel nosed him all over, flung a saddle blanket onto the powerful withers, adjusted it, tossed the saddle into place and pulled the cinch tight, made fast the whang leather tong, and slipped on the watering bridle.

"Ready, boy?" he asked, softly, giving the horse a little pat.

The sorrel whinnied an eager assent. Rider swung himself into the saddle, repeated his yarn to the sentry at the gate, and rode off into the dark.

There was a moon due about eleven o'clock, but, if the clouds held, that would not matter. He had what he needed, a dark night. The horse, after standing all day at the line, was a little stiff, but that passed by the time they had dropped down the long incline of the hill below San Felipe and had come to the bank of the river.

In spite of the rain the water was low, for they were on the heels of a long dry spell. The sorrel splashed across, and mounted the gravel bank on the opposite side. The wet smell of the rice paddies puffed unpleasantly in Rider's face as he breasted the rise and settled down to an easy trot. He had twelve miles, or a little less, to go, and until one o'clock to make it, if he kept his schedule.

The horse, moving now as if made of springs, leaned lightly against the bit. The night wind blew the rain into their faces as they raced along. Rider began to feel more like normal than he had since he had come, unexpectedly, upon that awful thing lying beside the ant-heap. Step by step he went over the details of what he wanted to do, and, unconsciously, his right hand sought and patted the blunt-nosed service revolver at his hip. The top sergeant's automatic was stuck into the waistband of his trousers, underneath his shirt.

A puff of cloying perfume swept by him. He sniffed distaste, swung round the bend in the road, and came into the single street of a *barrio*. Rider knew the little village well, visualized it in the darkness as he rode at a canter between the parallel rows of high bamboo fence, indifferent to the noise his horse made and the possible waking of the inhabitants.

The *barrio* behind him, he slowed down to a walk and searched the bamboo thicket on his left intently. Presently the dark mass lightened and he turned the sorrel's head

into a side road and tightened his legs. The horse responded by breaking again into the long swinging trot that ate up the furlongs.

It was past midnight now. The rain had stopped and there were signs that the clouds were breaking. Rider hurried. He wanted darkness, not moonlight, that night.

At the end of another mile he slowed his mount to a walk, and turned off the road to a spur of bamboo, the tops of which began to show against the brightening sky-line. Here he tied the horse with the halter shank, leaving the reins resting on the saddle, a well understood sign that the sorrel must stand still and keep quiet.

Beside the horse he stooped, brushed the wet earth at his feet smooth of twigs and leaves and gathered up a handful of mud with which he smeared his face and neck. He did the same with his hands and wrists. Lastly he removed his leggings and shoes, swung them over the saddle, and smeared his legs and feet with mud.

Satisfied that no white skin would show through the smeared mud when he came into the light, he walked with long, swift strides toward a black mass a hundred yards or so before him. It proved to be a high stone wall. Rider had forgotten the existence of this obstacle in his way.

He stopped beside the wall and listened. Somewhere nearby a lizard was making its curious, clucking noise. In the distance a woman was doing a monotonous *thump-thump-thump-ity-thump* as she pounded rice in a mortar. And, save for the murmur of the rising wind in the tree-tops, that was all.

Rider turned to his right and followed the wall until he came to an old shack, the nipa thatch of which had long since rotted away, leaving the bamboo skeleton leering awry in the vague light that filtered through the thinning clouds over the moon. He yanked one of the poles from the shack, tested its strength, and took it back with him to the wall.

The pole, with the slant he gave it, reached almost to the top of the wall. By its aid he managed to mount without a sound. Perched motionless, his feet inside the wall, he listened for a moment, and then dropped, with a slight squelch, into the mud of a compound.

Ahead of him, dimly outlined against the sky, was a building. He knew it for an old monastery. When the insurrection broke out, the natives had taken their ancient grudge against the monks to market and cashed in on it handsomely. One of the results was that the old building was no longer occupied by the brothers, nor devoted to the service of religion. But in spite of the gloom enshrouding it, Rider felt very sure that the old monastery was at that moment full of living men, some of whom, in all probability, were awake and listening.

He dropped on his hands and knees in the mud and began crawling toward the nearest corner of the building. Reaching his objective, he cautiously reconnoitered, thrusting his head around the corner. Vaguely he could distinguish the outline of the entrance portico, now roofless and ruined.

The night was getting lighter. He must hurry. Inch by cautious inch he crawled nearer to the entrance. His poncho dragged under his knees and hampered him. In the wet heat of the night he sweated under the rubber.

He was within five feet of the doorway when a smudge of white began to show against the black of the entrance. Seeing it, he lay flat on his belly and wriggled forward, for he knew that the white smudge was the shirt or pantaloons of a Tagal on guard.

Rider reached the broken curb of what had once been a well-kept walk and saw that the sentry, squatted upon his heels, was dozing. Very slowly, making no sound, the cavalryman raised himself to his knees and pulled his own service revolver from its holster, holding it by the barrel so the heavy butt might serve as a club.

He was within a foot of the man when the sentry yawned and began fumbling for a cigarette. Rider struck. It seemed to the American an absurdly inadequate blow, but the Filipino toppled forward without a sound. Rider gripped the man's throat, but there was no need for this precaution; the sentry was safe for a time.

The sergeant stood up and was about to enter the black doorway when a better plan presented itself; he stepped back into a niche where once the doorkeeper for the monastery had stood to peer through the latticed grating before opening to visitors.

In his hiding-place Rider made his few preparations unhurriedly. He twirled the cylinder of his revolver to see that it worked smoothly after the blow; drew out the top sergeant's automatic and made sure that it, too, was in readiness, then slipped both guns into his trousers pockets. Next he shed his poncho and cut off the selvage edge where the material was doubled and pierced with brass-bound holes. These strips he coiled neatly and put into the breast pocket of his shirt.

HAT done, he threw back his head and screamed—a long, cery, terrifying scream that, although he had not so meant it, might have been an echo of the scream that had come from the tongueless, lipless mouth of the man he had found beside the ant-heap. Twice he repeated the scream, and then shrank back into the dark of his niche.

A voice yelled loudly from somewhere in the building. Other voices took up the shout. There came a patter of bare feet on stone floors.

Rider pressed closer against the wall of his cupboard-like corner. A Filipino raced by him, to stumble over the prostrate sentry outside the door. Others followed in a mob, shouting, their bolos clinking as they struck against the stones of the wall. He could tell by their shouts that they were keeping close to the house in their search.

For a moment the success of his plan trembled in the balance. Then a tall man came stalking down the now dimly lighted hall and called out something in the ugly, clacking jargon of the Tagal. Rider dared not turn his mud-smeared face, but he knew the man was standing in the doorway.

As the man spoke the natives outside stopped their excited jabbering. Instantly they separated, one yelling group running toward the gate in the wall which Rider had dodged by the aid of his bamboo pole. Others began a wide search of the compound. The big man who had given the orders turned and retraced his steps, brushing against Rider on his way down the corridor.

The cavalryman waited until the man had disappeared in the dark before slipping after him. The corridor led to a large room that had once been the monks' refectory, but now lay ruined and partly open to the wind and rain. The remains of a fire burned on the stones of the floor and by its light Rider saw rather clearly the man he was following.

It was del Pilar, leader of the Luzon butchers of human flesh.

Del Pilar went to a door opening off the refectory and thrust it open. A dim light revealed the interior of a small chapel. A wooden crucifix still hung on the wall. Beneath it was a table on which gleamed the curved blade of a bolo. In a corner, on a low pedestal, stood a statue covered with silver foil, a life-size image of the Silver Saint of Baliuag. Rider saw all this as the ladrone chief passed into the little chapel and closed the door.

Throwing caution to the winds, the cavalryman ran across the refectory, pushed open the door to the chapel, rushed in, slammed the door behind him and confronted del Pilar. The halfbreed's lips went back from his betel-blackened teeth in a wolf snarl. Without a word, he snatched up the bolo. It was a weapon he knew how to use. He could slice off a head with it, Rider knew, as dexterously as he sliced off lips, eyelids and ears.

Rider's eyes lighted. The barrel of his gun lowered slightly until the foresight covered the broad chest heaving under the white shirt.

Del Pilar was no fool. He had been to Spain for his degree in medicine. He had studied in England and France. For more than two years he had led his band of human butchers, defying authority, daring arrest. He had a brain that was swiftly cunning, and a hand that was quick to act. Just now he was at a distinct disadvantage. Slowly he backed until he stood beside the Silver Saint of Baliuag, behind which he took refuge.

Slowly Rider followed, keeping the man covered.

"Eef you keel me," said del Pilar, "eet weel do you no good."

"Like hell it won't," growled Rider. "But I'm not going to 'keel' you unless I have to. You're going back with me to San Felipe. Come on!"

"You are mad!" snarled the halfbreed, but his eyes, showing the mongrel strain that made him what he was, began to waver under the steady, blazing hatred of the white man.

"Drop that bolo!" Rider ordered, quick to note the sign of fear.

Instantly the bolo dropped with a clatter to the stone floor, and the butcher chief clutched, with both hands, the shoulders of the statue.

"Come out of there!" Rider commanded.

This time del Pilar did not obey. Instead, he gave a shove with his arms and a sudden heave of his torso against the statue. Rider leaped aside just in time to escape the heavy figure as it crashed down upon the stones.

The last of the shattered pieces of plaster had not stopped flying before del Pilar was upon the cavalryman, jamming the sergeant's right arm close to his side and making it impossible for him to shoot. Then, as Rider twisted his body to throw the *mestizo* off, he dropped his revolver, and the fight became a struggle between man and man.

Rider was powerful, one of the most powerful men in C Troop, but he found his match, or almost his match, in the burly half-breed. Besides, del Pilar fought without thought of rule. His flying hands and long fingers

sought first the throat of his antagonist and then the eyes, seeking to choke or gouge. The cavalryman backed away from the corner, watching for his opening, well aware that at any moment the door of the chapel might be thrown open to let in the fighting men of del Pilar's band.

Back and back went the white man, and on came the brown, screaming, clawing, hissing hate like a puff adder, his lips drawn back from his betel-stained and blackened teeth, his black eyes gleaming like the eyes of a maddened bull.

At last Rider saw his opening and his right fist shot out in an uppercut that caught his assailant flush on the button of his brown chin. It was a clean knockout. The man's knees sagged under him, and into this eyes came the dazed, uncomprehending look of the knocked-out prizefighter. Then he slipped silently forward on his face and lay twitching and helpless.

Rider, breathing fast, jerked from the pocket of his shirt the stout lengths of selvage he had cut from his poncho, and after that a piece of cord with which he tied the long slender thumbs of del Pilar together.

Then he straightened up and recovered his revolver, which he thrust back into his pocket. For a moment he listened for sounds of the returning Filipinos, but the night outside was quiet. Del Pilar, however, was showing signs of returning consciousness. Bending over him, Rider used the selvage lengths to bind the brown arms together at the elbow. Then he rolled the man face upward and saw a flicker of returning consciousness in the bloodshot eyes.

"Get up," said the American. "It's time to start."

Del Pilar opened his mouth to scream, but before he could make a sound Rider had whipped out his revolver and had it aimed.

"Just try it, and you'll die like the rat you are. Get up!"

This time the bandit chief obeyed.

With the remaining length of the strips from his poncho, Rider threw a loop around the yellow throat, and thrust his closed, slim-handled knife into the slack at the back.

"That'll make a good garrote," he warned. "just in case you feel like squealing—Ah!"

The last was an exclamation of surprise and satisfaction. With his hand still at his captive's neck, he wheeled the man around to face the light.

"You lost something this afternoon, didn't you?" he asked. "Something you valued? I found it in the dirt—the bloody dirt. That's no place for the little Silver Saint of Baliuag."

From his own pocket Rider drew the little silver figure with its flapping, broken piece of chain. Del Pilar's face changed when he saw it.

"Oh, you don't need to claim it," the sergent assured. "I know it's yours. So will the authorities when they fit together the broken chain."

Still holding the garrote with one hand, he lifted from the brown chest a bit of broken silver chain which hung from a circlet of baser metal around the man's neck. It was the circumstantial evidence that he needed to convict his man.

At the door of the chapel they stopped.

"You listen careful to me," the cavalryman said slowly, and very softly. "We're going out there. If any of your gang has come back, you pray hard. I'm goin' to keep the muzzle of this revolver right in the small of your back, resting against the spinal cord. If it goes off you know what'll happen. You won't die right away, maybe, but you'll sure die, and die hard. *Sabe?*"

"What are you going to do with me? Am I a presconer of war?"

"Sure, you're a prisoner of war. You are going back to stand trial for several little acts —o' war, unless this gun o' mine goes off, like I told you."

Then he flung open the door.

ONLY smoldering ashes in the big, shadowy refectory showed where the fire had been. Still there was enough light in the room to have outlined figures passing a window. Rider meant to see to it that no figures were outlined.

First he must make sure that the chapel door was locked. He had gathered from the look of things in the chapel that del Pilar used it as his private room and office. The door, he was glad to find, fastened with a spring lock, a modern convenience the butcher chief had no doubt added himself. Rider locked the door and then, by a slight pressure on the strap at his prisoner's throat, kept him close to the inner wall on their way to the corridor, their bare feet making no sound as they moved over the stone flagging.

When he opened the door into the corridor he could hear low, excited gutturals outside the building at the entrance. It needed no psychic insight to tell him that the Filipinos del Pilar had sent to search the compound had returned and were trying to muster up courage to tell their chief the search had been fruitless.

The sergeant smiled in the dark. He had counted on this very thing.

About halfway down the main corridor a narrower passage branched off into another part of the building. Rider thrust the muzzle of his revolver a little harder into the small of his prisoner's back to hasten his footsteps and swung him into this darker way as the Filipinos began straggling back into the monastery.

A few feet down the passage he pushed the *mestizo* into a cell and waited, hardly daring to breathe. The main corridor was now filled with the soft padding of bare feet, broken by the guttural voices of the natives. Del Pilar moved restlessly. Rider quieted him with a sharp jab of the revolver and a twist of the garrote.

It seemed an hour before the last of the band passed into the refectory. At last, when all was quiet in the hall, Rider shifted his attention to the big room and waited till he heard some one try the door to the chapel, the chief's quarters. If they persisted, and finally forced an entrance to the chapel, he had no doubt as to what would be his own fate, and still less doubt as to what would happen to the cowering man he held powerless before him. However, if the dread of del Pilar sent them back to the fire to wait their chief's own time for the report, another step would have been taken toward the finish of the task he had set out to accomplish.

In any event, nothing could be gained by waiting longer. Back into the main hallway he marched his man, and out of the door and into the compound without seeing a soul. The natives, left to themselves, had forgotten to post a sentry in place of the one Rider had knocked out, and who was no longer lying before the entrance to the monastery.

The rain had begun again and the night had shut down darker than ever. Rider allowed himself a sigh of relief, and headed for the main gate, walking at a steady pace. And as he walked he whispered into the ear of the man so close ahead of him.

"If there's a sentry at the gate, you speak to him as we go through. Tell him we are going out. If he starts to stop us, or anything like that happens——"

He finished his sentence sufficiently to make its meaning clear by a jab of the gun against the man's spine.

Two gray patches, one at each side of the gate, showed Rider there were two sentries on duty there. He released the pressure of the garrote a little.

"Speak," he ordered, and del Pilar spoke. Just what he said Rider did not know, for the speech was Tagalog, but it served. The guards were motionless and silent as the pair went through the gate and into the open road.

The sorrel greeted Rider with a low whinny of joy. With the halter shank and picket line coiled on the saddle the cavalryman made his prisoner more secure, binding him hand and foot. Then, as if the man had been a bag of oats, he flung him face downward across the sorrel's withers, and swung himself into the saddle.

He had no idea of the time. He might have been an hour or three in the monastery and he had no wish to have the rising sun find him on the wrong side of the river. So, in spite of the double load, the horse had to hurry.

Now it began to rain in earnest. Down it came, a heavy, ever falling curtain that shut horse and riders in its trickling folds. The sergeant hardly realized it when they passed through the little *barrio* and came to the macadamized road again. In spite of the rain, in spite of the chill, in spite of the horror through which he had lived that day, his heart was warm and satisfied. He might be court-martialed for taking the captain's horse and being absent without leave, but he had done what he set out to do, and he knew that it was a good deed.

Across the river an idea came to him that caused him to swing hurriedly out of the saddle to complete the rest of the journey walking beside his mount. He had caught a mental picture of Captain Galt when he found that his beloved sorrel charger had carried double all the way from del Pilar's headquarters to the old convent where C Troop was quartered.

Without being seen by the outpost on duty, Rider led the horse past the old lightning-riven tree at the crest of the hill back of the convent and turned into the gate just as Hiser the troop trumpeter, gave tongue to first call. The rain had stopped and it was sunrise.

It was Lieutenant Sterling who saw him first and yelled. Then the top sergeant, coming out sleepily for roll-call, opened wide, amazed eyes, and ran with the lieutenant across the compound toward sergeant and captive. On their heels came most of the troop, trailed by the long legs and white mustache of the troop commander.

Rider halted at the head of the picket line and yanked del Pilar off the sorrel into a pile of hay. The man rolled over on his back and lay there blinking up into the faces that stared down at him.

"Who've you got there, Sergeant?" That was the lieutenant.

"What the hell do you mean by taking my mount?" That was the captain.

"It's del Pilar, sir," to the Lieutenant. "I took your mount, sir, because mine was tired." That was to answer the captain's question. "I went to del Pilar's headquarters over beyond Dos Hermanos Centrals and brought him away." That was to both the officers and to all the listening men.

"By gad," said the lieutenant, "you ought to get the Medal of Honor for this!"

"He ought to be court-martialed for using the troop commander's charger without permission," growled Captain Galt.

"I had to do it, sir," pleaded Rider. "The sorrel's the only horse in the command that could have made that twenty-four miles in the time I had to make it in—and nearly half of that time carrying double. Just look how spry he is, sir. That's some horse, sir." Rider was a little excited.

"That doesn't excuse you," growled the captain, though his eyes twinkled with amused approval. "You've got no business riding about this blessed country arresting bandit chiefs on your own."

"Begging the commanding officer's pardon, sir," said Riger, grimly. "No one has a better right to the capture. The man I had to shoot yesterday because of Pilar was—my—brother."

"My God!" breathed the lieutenant.

"Damn!" softly exploded the captain and answered Rider's formal salute, whereupon that young man turned and walked unsteadily toward the enlisted men's quarters, for he had suddenly realized that he was very, very tired.

"MAD ANN" BAILEY

WITH the possible exception of "Calamity Jane" it is doubtful if frontier history can produce a more unique, a more picturesque feminine character than Ann Bailey, commonly known as "Mad Ann," who was over seventy years old when she performed a series of exploits of which an active young frontiersman would have boasted.

Born in Liverpool in 1700, she came to Ohio with her husband in her forty-sixth year. In 1774 her husband was killed by Indians at the battle of Point Pleasant, and to avenge his death, Mad Ann joined the garrison there, under the command of Colonel William Clendenin.

The best authenticated of her exploits was her trip from the post to Lewisburg for ammunition. An attack by the Indians was expected and it was found that the ammunition was dangerously low. Lewisburg was one hundred miles away; the country between was infested with savages. To send a small body of men meant their probable destruction; a large force would weaken the defense of the fort.

Fully aware of the danger she incurred "Mad Ann" volunteered to make the trip to Lewisburg alone. By good luck and good woodcraft combined she traversed the hundred miles of wilderness and brought back a large quantity of powder and lead.

Like "Calamity Jane," "Mad Ann" seldom wore woman's clothing. Generally her short stout figure was garbed in a petticoat over which she wore a man's coat and buckskin breeches.

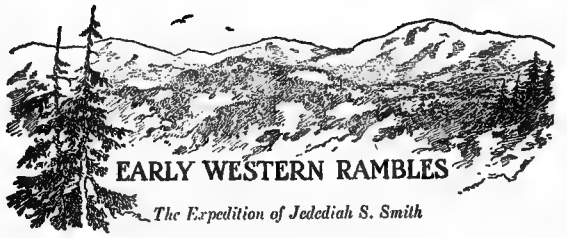
During her service in the Indian wars she almost invariably rode a horse called Liverpool. At one time she was closely pressed by a band of Indians and to avoid capture she abandoned her horse and took refuge in a hollow sycamore log. Capturing her horse, the Indians rested for a while on the log that concealed her and then continued their journey. That night she took up their trail, stole back her horse, and then, after getting a safe distance away, yelled defiance at them.

Her home in later life was a small cabin, little more than a hovel, built four miles below the present site of Gallipolis, Ohio. The crude affair, built of fence rails, boasted but one door, and one window of four panes. The big cracks in the walls were plugged up after a fashion with straw, and old rags over which was daubed a layer of mud. The hard-packed earth served for a floor, on which she slept. No furniture was ever in evidence.

Though anything but fine-looking "Mad Ann" was very intelligent, and could read and write—something of an accomplishment on the frontier in those days. She was in many ways a paradox. She was very careful to observe the Sabbath, and even taught Sunday lessons to children gathered about her. Yet she was an inveterate tobacco chewer and profane in the extreme. Boxing was not the least of her accomplishments, and gifts of whiskey she always found acceptable.

In 1790 she married John Bailey, a soldier—this at ninety.

She died in Harrison township, Gallia County, Ohio, at the age of one hundred and twenty-five.—H. J. A.



EARLY WESTERN RAMBLES

The Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith

By CLARENCE E. MULFORD

IN THE latter part of August, 1826, Jedediah S. Smith started with a party of a dozen or more men from Brown's Hole (Northeast Utah) to explore the Southwest, then unknown to Americans. They went past Salt Lake, passed the Sevier River Valley to the Virgin River, and down the latter to its junction with the Colorado, most of this stretch roughly paralleling the Old Spanish Trail. Following down the Colorado to a point about twenty miles south of where the California-Nevada line cuts the river, they left the stream and struck southwest across the deserts and lower coast range to San Diego.

Going northward up the middle of California, Smith left most of his men near the Merced River and with two companions turned eastward, crossed the great mountain range, passed just north of Mono Lake, and struck out northeastwardly toward Salt Lake, following an almost beeline course across the mountains and deserts of Nevada, where the sufferings of the party were terrible. Following along the western shore of Salt Lake he rounded its northern end and reached Cache Valley. Resting among the mountains only a short time, he added to his party and returned for the men he had left in California, following his route of the year before.

On the Colorado River the Mojave Indians attacked him, killed half his force, took his horses, mules and supplies, and forced him and the rest of the party to cross the deserts without proper equipment. They struck due west and reached San Gabriel on the tenth day after suffering untold hardships; and here they were jailed by the Spaniards. When he was released he took his men up the middle of California, swinging toward the coast upon reaching Oregon, and followed it to the mouth of the Columbia, which he followed to Ft. Vancouver. He had lost most of his men on that long northward march, had cached his furs, and was destitute when he reached the fort. Here the Hudson's Bay Company aided him, helped him to get his furs and paid him an honest price for them. Outfitted anew, he followed up the Columbia, crossed the Snake River, rounded the northern end of the Bitterroot Mountains, went up Clark's Fork of the Columbia to the Flathead post in northwestern Montana, meeting his partners, Jackson and Sublette, on the way.

His wanderings had taken three years almost to a day, and he had covered at least four thousand miles over deserts and mountains, through hostile Indian and Spanish territory, and acquired a wealth of geographic knowledge that was a valuable addition to what was then known of the regions through which he had passed. He had led a total force of thirty-three men on these wanderings, of whom two had deserted, two had been held by the Spaniards, twenty-five had been killed by Indians and two left at Hudson's Bay Company posts. He ended his journey with but two companions. Smith was an educated man, and by joining Ashley's company of fur-traders and trappers in 1823 he had acquired his mountain training from masters of woodraft.

In 1826 he formed a partnership with William L. Sublette and David B. Jackson and they bought Ashley out. Later they disastrously entered the Santa Fe trade, and in 1831 Smith was killed by an Indian arrow in his back at the Cimarron River while kneeling to drink.

EASY GOIN' OF THE BOX PLUMB BOB

By CLEM YORE

Hawk-moths and Evening Primroses interested Easy Goin' George—but there were others interested in hawk-moths of another type. And they did their collecting with six-shooters and a hangman's noose

EASY GOIN' GEORGE swayed in his saddle as his jaded buckskin plodded ahead, stumblingly, out of an *arroyo* and down the trail of a deep box-canyon which opened immediately beyond the fringe of a tangle of scrub covered knolls.

As the inflamed eyes of the man surveyed the sight below him they discerned growing grass beneath green trees; and, as his mind raced to this gladdening sight, his dust-caked nostrils, above his black-rimmed and swollen lips, became distended and quivered visibly as they caught the odor of plant-life. Then he detected in the air, that intangible, remote, vagrant substance, feel or presence of water. His consciousness swarmed with vagaries; his head dizzied; his body lurched, and, just as sight failed him, his dominant will shot a command to his tottering faculties and his hands clutched the saddle-horn and became rigid. With his knees gripping the saddle-skirt he rode down the abyss, the victim of a partial swoon.

The horse quickened its pace, lifting and dropping its ears, and at intervals tossing up its head in grotesque animation. It jerkily increased its stride till at length it stopped and stood in the sticky *adobe* of a water-hole, under cool cottonwoods and arching willows.

As a sack of wheat drops, so Easy Goin' fell from his saddle and lay immobile; limp, senseless, his face upturned, his neck and head half fallen in the shallow water.

The buckskin, drinking to a fatal satiety, sank gradually knee-deep in the mire. When, at last, its thirst was appeased, it raised its head. Immediately convulsions racked it horribly; then came cramps, due to excess of water. Emitting a piteous cry, it struggled vainly to drag itself from the grip of the gummy ooze, abandoned the endeavor, sank slowly to its side and in a moment was dead, a deep tremor shaking its wasted form as life left it. Man and beast had been without food or drink for thirty hours crossing the sweltering floor of that forbidding and trailless basin.

When Easy Goin' rounded into consciousness he pulled himself farther into the trickling water, laved and bathed his lips, mouth, neck and face and allowed the stream to run about his body.

"Jest a li'l drap at a time, fella!" he mentally adjured himself. "Bimeby, y'u c'n run yore snoot in full, a-plenty."

Through the semi-delirious craving of the thirst-mania, ran the control of his warning reason, for Easy Goin' was a child of the waterless waste-lands and knew the false

appetites from the real needs. He was well aware of the penalty from over-drinking; subconsciously he sipped the water and spat it out again and again, until after a while, he allowed the cool fluid to drop sparingly down the swollen depths of his throat. This stoical process he maintained until he had swallowed a small amount; then weakness overcame him and he slept. When he awoke the methodical sipping was continued until, under its spell, he revived. Then, turning his face about, he saw the carcass of his horse.

"Dern," he mused. "Old-timer, if I'd bin myse'f y'u w'udn't got water-bogged thata way. Ain't I in one gilt-edged lone-man jam? I w'u'dn't 'a' give a dime for y'u w'en I seen y'u, but I'd give a laig to have y'u back now."

He glanced about him languidly, noting the twilight shadows falling across the floor of the gulch. A chill dropped suddenly, penetrating to his bones, causing him to rouse and build a fire. Within the warmth of its mellow light he spread his form. As his clothes dried, he sprawled on his stomach, his head and shoulders propped by his elbows, his chin resting in the cups of his palms, his entire attitude suggesting an infinite dejection. Yet his mind was alert, functioning fully, without fear-obsession or emotional disturbance.

Calamity never appalled Easy Goin'. He was uncowed and unbeatable, for within him dwelt a supreme contempt for [illegible] save himself and his own capabilities. Long experience with nature had made him understand how kind she was to those of her kind. He was one of these.

Nevertheless he mused over his predicament.

Here he was, no idea where, with a dead horse and a few belongings. Somewhat miserly he went over these. There was a hand-made ornamental contest-saddle; a horse-hair bridle; solid silver, heel-chained spurs, with two and one half inch, six-point rowels; a pair of vallejo-chaps; a still-born calf-skin vest; thirty-inch yellow and purple neckerchief; seven-inch crown Stetson and inlaid, butterfly Hyer boots. His body was sheathed in dust-grimed and stained blue overalls, and about his hips hung a wide belt, from which swung a bone-handled six-gun. Easy Goin' had hit the bottom and yet life sang sweetly to him and he was not assailed with any weakening doubts.

"Doggone," he ejaculated, as his eyes detected a group of slender evening-primroses, some pure white, others soft rose and purplish yellow, "funny 'bout them beauties! Who'd 'a' thought of them dudes a-growin' way down yere?"

As he pondered he saw a blossom, that had been furled in a tight cup, split suddenly asunder, widen a trifle at the base and uncoil its petals. Then with a gentle rustling, like the tearing of a piece of crepe, the full bloom opened with a faint and delightful *plop*, audible to his overwrought hearing. It perfumed the air with the trace of a vagrant odor.

"I declare," he said, "if that ain't shore nice!"

He was familiar with this flower and its nature, and now watched it in fascinated admiration. In the wan rose-light of the fire, he saw other buds pop, as if in obedience to a set time. At the very first streak of dawn these little capsules of color would fold their faces, sleep and die, never to bloom again.

Soon a large hawk-moth, resembling a humming-bird, began to flutter around the willow-tops in the edge of the campfire's glow.

"Hawk-moths," he muttered; and absently recalled that, along that border, men who stole horses and cows were sometimes called by this name. "Afteh yore honey, boy?" he cogitated, watching the insect. "C'm an' get it. Le's see y'u wrangle yore chow. I've heered 'bout you, kid; now le's see y'u show yo're line of oil."

The moth, describing erratic flights in and out of the light, finally settled on an opened primrose and, burying its head, sipped the sweets from the hidden chambers of the flower, then flew to another plant. Easy Goin' casually plucked a blossom and hid it between the pages of a notebook in his vest. He liked primroses and admired the grim and fluttering, night-flying insects whose mission was to pollenize them. The hideous moth was essential to the life of the dainty night-blooming primrose, just as the flower was needed to feed the repulsive insect.

"Nature shore do have strange ways an' funny charmin' fashions," thought George. "Evenin' primroses so far south an' growin' in yere. How c'm this thing? Birds must 'a' brought 'em."

DISENTANGLING his riding gear from the dead pony and depositing it by the side of the fire, he investigated the bottom of the canyon, noting particularly here and there signs of recent occupancy by man and horse. At one place he found a corral; at another a dead fire, and beside this a straight iron that had been used for

branding—or brand-blotting. This he picked up and examined, then smiled significantly as he tossed the steel rod away.

Beside a spring under the shelf of a tall rock, he found a gallon canteen. It was intact, save for its cap. This he filled and swung across his shoulders and retraced his way to the fire. Flinging his bridle and saddle over his back, he began to ascend the walls of the depression and arrived at length on the floor of the desert. There he struck off resolutely, keeping the North Star constantly in sight and heading toward it always.

After a torturing journey of fifteen miles and when the rising sun beat too fiercely upon him, he sought the shade of a high outcrop, tilted the canteen against the rock, lay down and went to sleep. He had selected this spot because a faint and shambling road twisted by it and went on and on, somewhere, through the greasewood, over the heated floor toward a dancing blue haze which he knew to be the outlines of mountains.

Far into the early afternoon he slept until the climbing sun drove him from his resting-place, and while he slept ravens settled about the canteen. In their quarreling it upset, the water gurgling miserably into the porous sand. Then the ravens flew away.

The first move Easy Goin' made when he awoke was to reach for his water-container. As he touched its cloth bound side his eyes at once took in his predicament.

"Oh!" he gasped piteously, his swollen lips and bloated cheeks contrasting strangely with his sunken eyes and blistered flesh. Then, with sheer bravado, he added, "Ev y'u aint the little casino now, y'u c'n chew my ear. C'm on, George, y'u better hit the grit an' sift away fr'm yere like a home-sick hawg. Y'u aint no step an' a half hombre. Bend the landscape boy, an' run agin the country. Them hills is only half-way to hell."

He arose, stretched his arms, and stared upon the horizon of his back-trail, observing the odd formation of the mesas which led to the entrance of the box-canyon. He knew he could go back there and, drawing out his notebook, he sketched a small outline map of the lay of the land, to be used should he have to return there for water that night. Now he decided to keep "joltin' on," always toward the north, just hoofin' as long as he could.

At that moment his ears caught a faint sound, a familiar sound, the creak of taut leather, the hangle of chain, the metallic note of iron tires squashing sand. Then came the far drone of a human voice. He whirled about and beheld a spiral of dust spinning along through the greasewood.

"Hot dawg!" he exclaimed. "Right now my luck's as handy as the pocket in a shirt."

Setting himself and saddle squarely in the middle of the road, he cocked an ear toward the approaching sounds. Soon he heard a man's rasping voice singing a familiar tune, and he smiled wearily as he recalled that old-time Frio Valley song, which he had last heard as he drank mint juleps in the ancient bar of the Menger.

"Yep," he murmured, "that shore is just it." Mentally he repeated the words.

There was a young waddie a-ridin'
A-ridin' a big blue roan.
An' the pear-flat behind him was slidin'
A-slidin' to San Antone.
An' the waddie was yi-yi an' yippin'
An' sometimes a snort he was sippin'
But on through the night he was slippin'
A-forkin' his big blue roan.

Out of the gray depths of the dusty shrubbery, a team of six mules and a freight-wagon appeared. From beneath a tarp sunshield a gaunt and leathery face, peering in astonishment, gaped at the slim and wavering figure standing straddle-legged in the sand.

"Hallo!" yelled the being under the tarp, tossing the lines in his hands to the canvas above the seat.

"Howdy," greeted George, amazed by the ludicrous action of the reins and startled by the quavering tones of the voice. "Man, y'u is just run in per-zactly on time."

"Where's yore hoss?"

"Daid."

"How c'm it be daid?"

"It wa'n't no sun hoss—an' jest nacherly c'u'dn't drink sand."

"Fling in that leather an' climb up. Is y'u due for water?"

"I'm late. My insides soun' like hawg meat a-sizzlin' in a skillet."

"Dip into one of them barrels. That 'ere water's wet."

When Easy Goin' had appeased his thirst, the wagon rolled forward.

"Have y'u missed any meals?" the teamster asked suddenly, as though struck by a sudden realization of a grave breach of hospitality.

"Nope," grinned Easy Goin', "but I've postponed a few."

"*Whoa!*" The team stopped.

"Dive undeh that sackin' an' pull out that tin box," the driver continued. "They's grub in there. Fatten up, boy, fatten up. Ain't I the unpolite-inest old son-of-a-gun y'u ever see?"

EORGE ate, and during the satisfaction of his hunger his companion eyed the exquisite embossing and hand-tooling of his saddle and noted the excellence of bridle and spurs, the ornate boots.

"Is you a fancy rider?" this observation finally compelled him to remark.

"Not too damn fancy," gulped George; "jest tol'able."

"Mind much 'bout exposin' yore name?"

"Shucks, no. It's George, but most outfits I've quitted back of me they calls me Easy Goin'."

"*Is that so?*" the driver commented as though stunned, whereupon he slapped a biscuit out of George's hand with the end of a rein.

"Dern," he said. "'Xcuse me! I'm off agin. Easy Goin', huh! W'y, y'u sunk-eyed dust-eater, I knows you. I'm wo'kin' for the Box Plumb Bob, a reg'lar cookin'-stove brand, an' thay's some fellers there as is all the time studyin' up lies 'bout y'u an' yore ridin'."

"Who?"

"Spittin Bill, he's foreman; Yakima Frank, Sam Garrett, Slim Caskey, Powder Face Tom, Oh Oh Jones, Pole Kitty Kelly, an' Rootin' Tootin' Shootin' Dave Hooten."

"Them old pot-hounds," muttered Easy Goin'. "I'll be a-bustin' out a-cryin' I bet, when I hears the first bundle of adjectives them gives me. W'at's yo're name?"

"Jim. They calls me Jerkin' Jim, 'cause of a af-flicksun, when I gets excited like. Didn't ja see me fling them ribbons at yore biscuit? I cain't he'p the damn thing a-tall."

"I knows y'u, Jim," cried George, "fr'm meetin' up with a side-kick of yours by the name of Vinegar Bill. He's most gone now, jest wo'kin' on the tails of his last lung. He's as poor as bees runnin' on alkali water."

"Giddap!" shouted Jerkin', twitching his arms grotesquely. "Well, ha, ha! If this ain't a-beatin' the devil hisse'f. C'm on, kid, an' sprinkle yore tongue. Y'u're settin' in with friends. It'll be two days afore we're under anything but sky. Tell me where y'u been, w'at y'u're doin', where y'u c'm fr'm an' goin' to. I wants it all, fr'm calico to calaboose, yo're sin an' yo're slander. Ef y'u knows any scandal, joy, indecency or backslidin' tote it to me, for gossip to my ears is like a hen-house to a skunk. Slide out, mules, and take youre time."

Easy Goin' settled himself and began.

"I went down to Laredo from the Circle Dots, where I was a ridin'for some time, an' I figgered on ridin' exhibition down thata way an' also slantin' a eye oveh them brahma-cows they're a-breedin' in southwest Texas. Now lissen, w'at I'm a tellin', an' wind it right around yore brow. Them cows cain't be bulldogged ef they wants to run, an' the pony ain't foaled yet as c'n step close enuff to one of 'em to let a man drop his bosom on their horns. An' if he was to do sech a thing, he'd think he was mixin' a Kansas fence-twister or head-lockin' a switch engine.

"I heered about them critters," remarked Jerkin'. "They's sacred cattle, ain't they?"

"Sacred to Satan," replied Easy Goin'. "Well, I fooled about learnin' them sorta things for more'n a year, ridin' for the K. M. K., then for the M. O. H., which same jest nacherly plasters a cow's hide from shoulder to rump. Then I draws my pay an' lopes up to Paso, w'er I plumb lost my voice sain' 'That's good' in a stud-game up there. I stashed my bridle and saddle an' was aimin' on gettin' a job in the Frio w'en I runs into a ski-hi-in', stampedin', sassy sort o'kid fr'm South Carolina.

"Him an' me jest nacherly fits in like a buckle to a belt an' we takes in the town for a coupla days.

"Then, one mornin', cravin' nootriment, we sidles into Chink Sam's—which, b'sides bein' the place where y'u get yore other shirt washed, is a sorta one-burner, flip-skillet hashery. Me, I'm sold on a stringy chunk of T-bone which kinda interrupts my talkin' f'r a while, but Carl takes a real gamble. Not stoppin' to consider what's liable to happen to a fresh young infant of an egg left layin'—or settin'—which is it an eggiet does?—in that nice steamy atmosphere for three-four weeks, Carl hollers out an order f'r Adam 'n' Eve on a raft. 'Wreck 'em!' he commands, fierce-like.

"Well, they was *wrecked*, all right—but Chink Sam didn't have to throw in no extra work to pervide the distress. Lookin' up at Carl from right on top his toast is the beak and eyes o' the cutest lil' chicken face y'u ever seen!

"Carl gives it one slant. His knife stops in midair, an' he blushes—leastways, his face gets all pinkish. Then he goes right straight up in the air like a Piute yowlin' out his skinful o' shinny, an' lights right on top the counter! With one fist he grabs Chink Sam's cue, an' with the other a coupla them near-chickens from the egg crate.

"*Bam!* Chink Sam, screamin' like a cougar cat is chewin' off his ears, gets a free shampoo right then. Them eggs ain't really so awful yellow, anymore, but, with Chink

Sam gettin' pale, they look it an' *smell* it, streamin' down his phiz!

"Carl does a good, thorough job. To finish up he jams the poor heathen right into the crate, an' sloshes him up an' down like he's the business end of a churn.

"Then we ambles down a alley, an' a long barrelled, snoop-headed, dish-faced cop folds us to his bosom."

"Did they run y'u in?" exploded Jerkin'.

"Well, the jedge said, next mawnin', talkin' kinda fatherly to the Chink Carl whammed, 'Now y'u tells this yere cote all that oc-curred,' an' that heathen shore did. But in the harangue he left me out plumb. Y'u'd 'd' thought I was pickin' cherries at a Sunday school picnic about that time, for all he said ag'in me. His grouch seemed to be all around the Buford boy. Then his honor says low an' tantalizin', as he was makin' a church steeple outa his hands an' fingers on the docket, he says, 'How c'm y'u to bust this yere citizen?' lookin' right at Carl,

"'Jedge,'" says Carl, losin' all his hardness an' growin' confidential, "I'm a peaceable cuss, horsebroke an' tamed mos' unusual. The trouble is I'm jest too danged modest, thassall. I couldn't go havin' that there pin-feather egg lay there an' *look* at me reproachful like—me with a knife in my hand! Honest, it riled me. I clumb Chick Sam's frame, like he says, but y'u see how 'tis, Jedge. Y'u see, dontcha?'

"'I fines y'u twenty-five dollars. Has y'u anything to say?' says the judge.

"'*Twenty-five?*' asks Carl. 'Yaas, suh. I got somethin' to mutter. Of all the low-down, humpety, hump, hump, mangey white men I ever see, y'u wins the sweet-scented jingaree bottle an' the Abysinnia jeely-plant. Y'u is jest four degrees lower than the belly of a mud-turtle; y'u is——"

"'Twenty-five more,' yells th' cote, 'for contempt.'

"'I gotcha,' comes back Carl, 'an' fu'thermore an' likewise, I cain't tell whuther y'u is the fifth card in a four-card flush or jest a bum rim-fire shell. For one keg-built *hombre* with the manners of a turkey buzzard at the feast of a daid cow El Paso oughta ee-rect a statue to y'u fifty feet under ground for the benefit of centipedes and tumble-bugs.'

"'Twenty-five mo',' suggests the Judge, an' right there I steps on my podner's foot. But, shucks, y'u c'u'dn't head him. He was gone hawg wild elocutin'. 'An' likewise, in particular,' he proceeds, 'ef this is Texas, an' y'u is the law as allows Chink hash-slingers to serve Noah's Ark when all y'u ask for is Adam 'n' Eve, then I'm a-holdin' there's a heap of pewter in the body politic of this yere commonwealth.' He shore c'u'd sling self-cockin' words.

"'Twenty-five mo',' smiles the Judge, an' then Carl lights.

"'That's a-plenty, yore honah,' he says, sweet an' low, like a widow singin' in the moonlight. 'Ef I is fined one mo' jitney, I ain't got railroad fare back to my clabber an' hot-bread.'

"'Does y'u mean,' says the cote, 'that w'en y'u gets outa yere y'u'll go back home an behave?'

"'Does I mean it?' shoots Carl. 'Why I'll lean agin the air so fast I'll bend the horizon.'

"'Then, in that case,' says his honor, 'I'll remit the fines. Y'u may go—an' as for y'u,' he says, turnin' a fish-eye on me, "I reckon El Paso c'n run itse'f right proper without y'u inspectin' its streets an' alleys. Ef y'u is out o' town by sundown y'u wont be hampered none atall, but if y'u sniffs one bit of the cool of the evenin', that is the time w'en——'

"'Yaas, suh, Jedge,' I says; 'that's all the time I'll be a-needin'.

"An' that was where Carl an' me separated. He loaded hisse'f in a car with two hundred *blau blau's* fr'm Mexico an' sifted east. I strolls to the barn where I got my saddle an' asks a fella whicha way out is quickest. He tells me 'bout a place called S'prise Flats an' a outfit goin' by the brand of Star B Bar. I buys a li'l old fryin'-pan hoss an' leaves the country. I rides six days gettin' mo' directions to that Star B than w'u'd patch hell a mile; an' then a dust-storm hugs me close an' keeps me so busy I don't know much 'bout nothin' except breathfightin'. I winds up out on a big flat an' me an' old skillet-hoss is pluggin' waterless through the sand an' pear. I nevch see so much pear in my life. Pear an' Joshua trees. I have to laugh right frequent at the run-down condition of that whole layout.

"A rattlesnake w'u'd a looked like Easter mornin' to me, but all I see is hell-for-scootin' lizards an' one old buzzard a wheelin' agin the sun. Funny how I cheated that old air-rooster. Then last evenin' long about three, four, five o'clock, that old daid-hide flips me outa the dust an' flops me alongside a water-hole an' under a lota' cottonwoods. I'm gone, when I lights. Plumb forgot 'bout usin' a stirrup gettin' off old gristle-bone, an' took a header for the mud. W'en I gets familiar with the sky once mo' old fryin'-pan is daid from overloadin' with water-ballast an' I arises, slants a eye around, finds this yere road an' along comes y'u."

"Where's that water-hole?"

"Right yondeh; 'tween them hogbacks what ain't hogbacks. Them's red an' purple mesas dealin' a phony landscape."

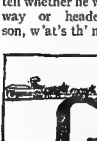
"Fella, that must be Lost Gulch. Thay ain't but four men eveh been at that spring an' three of them is daid. One old-timer knows that 'ere place; that's all."

"W'at y'u calls this sink about yere?"

"The Devil's Pincushion," replied Jerkin'. "She's forty mile one way by thirty the other."

"Whoeveh stuck that name to this basin shore knew his beans."

"Yep," Jerkin' expanded, "an' she's plumb nex' to nuthin' when it comes to followin' a trail oveh it. W'y crossin' this pear-patch a man c'u'dn't track a troop of slidin' barns. See how the wind's always a-suckin' at the sand; it jest nacherly e-rases footprints an' hoofmarks so soon, seems like Satan he's se'f won't stand for no man-marks a-tall. Gin a rider three hours jump an' y'u w'u'd have to have a peach bough an' a water-locator to tell whether he went no'th, south, Panhandle-way or headed for Lordsburg— W'y, son, w'at's th' matteh?"



GEORGE had fallen against the old driver, his head dropping on his shoulder, a miserable pallor spreading across his face. Jerkin' stopped the team and laid him upon a pile of bedding and frequently as the day wore on he would halt the mules and note the labored breathing of the boy. Satisfied at last that Easy Goin' had lapsed into needed and natural slumber, he worried no more.

They camped that night in the open and two afternoons later drove up to the Box Plumb Bob. Easy Goin' had revived and his face had assumed its normal condition. As they rolled into the ranch-yard Spittin' Bill rushed out to meet the wagon and caught sight of the slender figure beside Jerkin'.

"Rootin' Tootin', look w'at this yere old locoed Santa Claus brung us," he yelled back at the bunkhouse. "Jerkin' don't give a damn what rides with him."

"Hallo, y' old horned toad," cried Easy Goin' leaping from his seat. "How y'u all lives so long is one of the seven wondehs of the universe. Touch my flesh, y'u old son-of-a-gun."

"Dern my gizzard," yelled Spittin' Bill, grasping his hand, "if y'u ain't arrived jest in time. Boy, y'u is uglier'n hell still, ain't y'u? How c'n a man live with a face like that?"

Then up rushed Oh Oh Jones, Pole Kitty Kelly, Slim Caskey, Powder Face Tom and the rest of George's old friends. Rootin' Tootin' was lathering his face at the corner of the bunkhouse but when he saw Easy Goin' he plunged his head in a trough and wiped it clean with one wild circular swipe of a towel. Then he came forward on the jump and slapped George between the shoulders with a blow that nearly knocked the boy flat.

In honor of the arrival Spittin' Bill donated a case of peaches and the cowboys squatted about the ground eating the sweet fruit from the ax-opened cans.

Just before supper a trim little figure mounted on a paint pony whirled into the yard, in a cloud of dust, reined her mount to a flying stop and leaped nimbly to the ground. Easy Goin' devoured her face with his eyes and, as Spittin' Bill hurried forward, he followed him to the girl's side.

"Miss Mazie," said the foreman, "this yere lath-built hombre's Easy Goin' George, the feller I showed y'u in them Cheyenne pictures."

"Hello, Easy Goin'," she greeted amiably, extending a small gloved hand. "Bill surely raves about you. Says you're a part son of his."

"Glad to meet y'u, ma'am," responded Easy Goin' in confusion. Then he added, "Yaas, ma'am, Spittin's right fond of claimin' ev'rything in sight. That's a pony y'u're a-ridin'."

"He sure is," replied Mazie; "four year old next spring and he sure can leave town."

Then she wound her way through the boys and into the ranchhouse, the memory of Easy Goin's smile haunting her all the way. As Spittin' Bill talked beside Easy Goin' while George unsaddled the pony he chatted about Mazie and her father and their holdings.

"The Lord sure set a pace for hisse'f when he built that gal. She's purtier'n anything in calico fr'm the Rio Grande to George Washington's birthday, sweet as a pinon-nut an' clean as a pup's tooth," said he. "What's yore ideas, special-like, on her?"

George heaved a long drawn sigh.

"Bill," he said, in a lowered voice, "yere's one philanderin' fool w'at had better let this country slide out fr'm undeh him *pronto*. I've got the calico chilblains. W'en I looked in her eyes I jest felt my soul peterin' out; an' my flesh an' bones are turnin' butter-soft, right now. If she hinted to me that

she'd lost a three-cent piece in hell, I'd ride them clinkers an' hand-sift them cinders with a tea-strainer, 'til I found it. If thay eveh was a plumb lady-mold, huh, then God Almighty busted it afteh he made her."

"That's how us all feels. An' that's w'y all us hard-boiled top-hands is ridin' an' ropin' for starvation wages, just to he'p her old man cheat four or five of these outfits what is crowdin' him. Will y'u stick an' he'p me out? It'll mean a lot to have y'r ridin' line an' keepin' a eye on our outlyin' bunches."

"Stick!" yelled Easy Goin'. "Did y'u say 'stick'? W'y, no wild bronc that eveh snorted at the drift of a fence c'u'd drag me outa sight of this yere layout. I know I'm goin' to catch heart-hell an' hit the plumb bottom of despair, but thay's my mit. Now tell me something. Tell it *all* to me. I'm cravin' information about her daddy."

SPITTIN' BILL told of the warfare that was then going on between Bent Webster, Mazie's father, and some crooked outfits to the north. The Box Plumb Bob worked sixteen men and ran close to six thousand cows. The ranch nestled in a small bend of the Broken Wheel River and was truly an oasis in a dry and hateful region. On the outer edges of the grass, where the cattle were wont to feed a part of each year, the renegade cattlemen had been in the habit of turning in their stock and eating up all forage and exhausting the water-holes. This condition impoverished and overcrowded the range nearer the river and kept the Box Plumb Bob cattle in a state that often demanded special feeding and much added expense.

Bent Webster was one of those ranchers, of whom the west has many, who, though not a coward, was given to the neglect of his rights. Spittin' Bill had imported hands who were accustomed to "taking theirs" whenever and wherever it was found; they feared no man, cared for no outfit other than the work at hand and were gradually asserting a combative attitude toward the countryside.

It was at such a time that Easy Goin' arrived. Warfare was on the point of breaking out into the open; fences had been strung and strange cattle driven from the water-holes. Twice Spittin's men had dropped a bullet close to wire-cutters and twice they had been fired on while driving alien cattle from the distant feeding grounds.

HIM fella just come in, him, slim, tall, small-boy, make 'em old boy Jerkin' Jim fling beans to cook-shack roof," Jim Sam, the Chinaman cook, confided to Mazie as he removed the ranch-owner's dishes from the table. "He heap fine fella, Mlissi Mazie."

He said a great deal more, so that during the night Mazie dreamed, and in her vision Easy Goin' was at her side riding in a strange land covered with growing roses.

After breakfast she sat on a top-pole of the corral watching George pick out his horse. He selected Sad Sam, a sixteen-hand chestnut gelding, hitherto unridden by any member of the ranch. Never before had Mazie seen a man so suggestive of sunshine and cool winds, gristle and night skies. As soon as he caught her eye he blushed and smiled, and she thought his face resembled the nodding hollyhocks growing under her heaven-tree.

He was well made, slender, powerful; red-blooded, uncouth, and yet, withal, it seemed to her, gentle to a point of womanliness.

Slowly George approached the gelding, carrying in one hand a short thin lass-rope.

"C'm on podner, we's goin' be sweethearts me an' y'u. Thay ain't nuthin' skeery 'bout me, le's get acquainted," he talked to the horse as he went directly toward it.

The tall rangey animal shifted its weight and stood at a supreme tension. Its eyes rolled; it trembled along its length, yet it made no move. Easy Goin' fixed it with his gaze and continued talking smoothly and kindly to it, all the while holding the rope motionless.

"Watch them front paws, an' likewise he's fancy with them teeth," Spittin' Bill, from his position on the fence, warned as George came within ten feet of the animal.

Mazie clutched her arms till her fingers sank into her flesh. What she was beholding was the essence of dare-devilry. George was all alone with that incorrigible beast in that small corral. Save for the scattered men, ready to throw loops about the horse, if it went man-killing wild, Easy Goin' was unprotected. His voice sang on in an even monotony, and he advanced a step at a time till, with an outstretched hand, he stroked the shoulder of the beautiful chestnut and ran his fingers among the strands of his heavy mane. Then with a gentle and deft turn he slipped the rope around the head of the horse and fashioned it into a rough hackamore. With the settling of that rope, the gelding's

eyes became calm, its ears wriggled, it dropped its tension.

"One of y'u boys fetch my saddle," requested George.

Mazie praised him, carried away by the exhibition of grit.

"Splendid, Easy Goin'. I would not have believed such a thing possible."

"Y'u-all better wait till it comes Sam's turn," responded George.

"Y'u aint a-lyin' none, fella," cried Kickin' Pete, a surly puncher who had treated Easy Goin' with open disdain ever since they had been introduced. "Y'u better hang up that star-spangled-banner vest for it's sure a-goin' to be messed some."

Easy Goin' caught and held the taunting man's eyes and smiled chill contempt back into them with a cool exasperation.

Just then men covered Sam's face with a gunny-sack. When he was saddled and the blind adjusted, Easy Goin' moved in close, took the hackamore tie-rope in his hand and prepared to mount.

"Ten bucks y'u don't cradle him three bucks," Kickin' Pete yelled.

"Am I good for that amount?" asked George of Spittin' Bill.

"Hell, yes," came the reply.

"Y'u've braided a bet, big boy; an' my saddle to fifty mo' that I don't pull leather," Easy Goin' shot back at Kickin'.

"How much of a ride?" queried Pete.

"Till I fork him back through that gate."

"Fifty goes, an' the ten, too, to buy polish for that saddle," sneered Kickin'.

Then the horse was led outside the bars where there was running-room and hard-pan bucking-ground.

"Here goes," announced Easy Goin' as he let his eyes fall into those of Mazie.

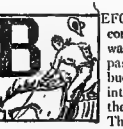
Then he grasped the stirrup, turned it quickly, inserted a foot and was in the saddle exactly as the gunny-sack was yanked from the eyes of the horse.

For an instant Sad Sam stood as though turned to stone; the next he was in the air, only his hind feet touching, his upper body and fore feet describing a series of convulsive motions which suggested sheerest anger and outrageous fury. Suddenly he plunged, hunched, side-twisted—and then struck the earth rigidly. Pole Kitty grunted with the shock of that impact.

Scarcely had Sam hit the earth than he was in the air, whirling and wheeling, his white tail swishing, his chestnut body flashing like gold in the white light of the sun. At each swing of that dashing beast the butterfly boots and long spurs of Easy Goin' could be seen rubbing along his side. Only once did daylight show between the man and saddle and that was when, after a swift circular swing, Sam reversed suddenly, half fell, arose, leaped and sunfished seemingly altogether. With an accurate side lurch, as graceful as it was quick, Easy Goin' hit the saddle correctly and once more took up the inflexible tattoo with his spurs. Then Sad Sam leaped and clawed and——

"He's gettin' ready to leave the country," shouted Rootin' Tootin'.

"Yea bo!" Spittin' Bill agreed. "Now y'u'll see *real* humpin'."



BEFORE the audience could comprehend it the horse was tearing across the pasture in long four-footed bucks which seemed to interfere in no wise with the speed of his flight. Then it sunfished with such rapidity and reached so high in the air that with every impact it shook George with unqualified torture. Those rigid legs striking the earth imparted the full force of the shock to the man in the saddle. Yet he held. Still he flung home those large six-point rowels and scraped the golden flank and neck and shoulder.

Down through the pasture the plunging beast shot, hitting the grit in race horse speed and striking the earth with stiff-legged bucks every thirty feet. Presently the crowd saw Easy Goin's hat beating across the left eye of Sad Sam and then the watchers beheld the horse turn in a wide circle and approach the corral on a dead run. The bucking and whirling falls had ceased; that gelding was racing, obeying the desires of the unshakeable thing on its back.

Twice it went by the fence and twice Easy Goin' smiled at the blanched face of a staring girl. On the third journey of that immense circle, as the horse approached, Mazie saw that Sam's eyes had in them a gleam of fright, a sense of fear; his distended nostrils clearly exhibited the punishment the noble beast was enduring.

Then it was that Easy Goin' laid back on the tie-rope. He yanked and pulled and drew its length against the golden neck of the horse till Sam, obeying that hempen urge, dashed for the down bars of the corral, leaped them, and lit quivering; he trotted to a far corner and stood stock-still. The head drooped, the eyes calmed, the ears moved. That beautiful body, now a mass of foamy lather, vibrated and shook with an emotion that was the epitome of surrender.

"Well, fella," said Easy Goin' to Kickin,

Pete, "was that ride worth the sixty y'u paid for it?"

"Spittin' will give y'u the money," replied Kickin' viciously as he started to move away, but Easy Goin' called him back.

"I reckon this yere outfit's too small for y'u an' me, after th' dirty look I see in yo're eye," he said quietly. "Which of us is a-goin' to scatter?"

No one heard the words except Kickin', yet everyone saw the look in Easy Goin's face and the slight twitching throat muscles of Kickin' as he received their import.

"I was plumb wrong on y'u, kid," he changed face, extending his hand, after a moment of hesitation. "I reckon y'u're right white. Shake!"

"Nope, that ain't on the square."

Kickin' turned on his heel.

"I want to congratulate you," said Mazie rushing up at that instant. "I've seen real riding at last. It was a treat."

"Shucks," said Easy Goin', averting his eyes, "'tain't hardly fair to Sam an' me to call that a ride. Y'u see, old Sam an' me fell in love at first sight an' he didn't aim much to hust me right hard; he just thought I was a-wantin' to win that money."

Mazie was attired in a striking riding suit of white doeskin with dainty boots, shirt waist and trim trousers, her heavy black hair tucked under a wide Stetson. An invitation and an appeal lay in her eyes and, Easy Goin', caught in the lure of her gaze, fumbled with his hat-brim as he stood bareheaded before her. Jerkin' likewise was thrilled.

"Damn, if I ain't a-goin' like a drunken eel," he yelled, flinging his arms in the air.

The spell was broken.

"Won't you allow me to ride with you when you mount him again?" asked Mazie.

"Why, ma'am, I'd jest like that splendid."

"When are you goin?"

"Right now! Bill was a-wantin' me to ride that string of new fence west of the river. I'll slip a bridle on Sam an' we'll take a *poco pasear* along that wire."

"Good! I'll have Jim get my pony while I get some lunches put up. I know all that west country and I won't bother you a bit."

While Mazie was gone Easy Goin' put his bridle on Sad Sam and mounted. As the horse felt the long legs about it, and the stroking hand fondling its shoulder, a great peace filled it.

"As shore as the Lord made li'l green apples there's another good man gone plumb wrong," commented Spittin' Bill, as the pair rode from the corral.

"Did y'u see th' look in Miss Mazie's eye when she rid away?" exploded Hooten.

"I suttinly did: an' when a gal wears that kind of a look a man might as well do what Lee did at Appomattox."

Kickin' Pete approached in a surly manner.

"Gimme my time," he demanded. "I'm a-quittin' right now."

"C'm on to the house," said Bill. "Y'u aint' sech a damn fool afteh all."

That night Kickin' Pete rode up to a ranch-house twenty miles away and joined a grizzled old cowman at a kitchen table.

"I reckon I c'u'd put my paws on one fancy hoss-gentler," offered Pete as an opening, "an' I'm a meanin'—*now*."

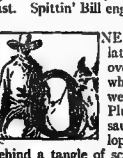
"Who? What's his name?"

"Easy Goin' George. Jerkin' Jim picked him upon th' Devil's Pincushion, without nary hoss an' packin' his saddle. This mornin' I lost sixty dollars on him a-ridin' Sad Sam."

"Whoo-eee! Did he ride that murder-maker?"

"Ragged," replied Kickin' in disgust. Then he launched into a full description of Easy Goin's arrival with Jerkin', his reputation as a cow-hand and of his fame as a tracker, trailer and hard-riding stray-man. "An' my reckon is," concluded Pete, "that Spittin' brung him in secret-like to interfere with y'u an' yore game an' remove with a forty-four what the Box Plumb Bob ain't been able to get shet of. Now, Phil, if I was y'u I'd shoot a bad-boy down to the Box Plumb Bob to take my trick an' have him there to keep a eye on that bird. Let him have the best glasses y'u got, a good gun an' say a prayer for a fight that'll bump that bird off legal. They're a-needin' a new hand to wrangle hosses in my place."

Before midnight Phil Shroeder and his trail-boss, Hair-trigger Vetters, had definitely decided that Easy Goin' was a menace to the prosperity of the Diamond Bar Hangin' N. It was thought best to send a man whom they could trust to watch George and get him if he could. Accordingly before dawn a fast gunman by the name of Baldy Moody, strange to that range, was on his way to the Webster ranch. He rode around it and came up on the far side, reporting just at breakfast. Spittin' Bill engaged him.



ONE afternoon, two weeks later, Easy Goin' rode over the Piñon Hills, which ran parallel to the west line of the Box Plumb Bob. As he was sauntering along in a slow lope, a rider shot out from behind a tangle of scrub-growth riding fast and bending low. As he neared George he

raised his face and his mouth broke into a wide and amiable grin.

"Whoa!" he shouted, bringing his pony to an abrupt halt. "Doggone, if it ain't old Easy Goin'!"

"Hello, Bud," greeted George, "how come y'u so far off th' old feed-ground? Y'u told me once ev'ry body was only roamin' when they was out of old Wyomin'."

"I'm nestin' down yere 'bout four miles. What y'u doin'?"

"Ridin' fence for the Box Plumb Bob, oveh east of yere about thirty mile. Know the outfit?"

"Yep. Spittin's there, ain't he?"

"Uh-huh. Lead on, boy; has y'u got any kinda grub down yore way as tastes an' chews like food?"

"C'm on. I'll splatter y'u some pancakes. I'm shore glad to see y'u. How long's it been?"

"Three years ago, in Cheyenne. Me an' y'u was one, two, in the buckin' contests, this was the saddle I won. That 'ere's some hoss y'u're a-sittin'; he's a shore-enough hoss."

"Yep, lots of flash; an' he's never showed me yet that travel ain't his middle name. I neveh see a hoss as c'u'd camp with him day in an' day out. He's all run down to bottom an' walk. Say, I'm goin' to take him up to Laramie an' show them screw-tails what a walkin'-hoss is. He's good for sixty any day oveh these brick-yards."

The two men rode to Bud's cabin talking over the old days of Wyoming, over the exhibitions they had ridden and the times they had frozen and sweat at work or at play.

"Huh," laughed George as they rode into a small corral almost hidden by bushes and high cottonwoods, "y'u c'n melt, freeze, drown an' die of dust, in old Wyomin' in the same spot on the same day."

"Shore can," replied Bud, "an' them old slick-ears up there was a-thinkin', when I left, of passin' a law forbiddin' cyclones fr'm enterin' the state. Right now they's a tide of immigration consistin' of homesteadin' school-marms an' over-all wearin' wimmen writers dottin' the bad-lands with shacks they's a-callin' chalets. The damn sage's gettin' to smell too much like talcum-powder to suit me. Slip that baby of yores in the stable. Y'u'll find some feed in there."

Bud turned his horse loose in a corral, then went to the cabin and prepared a meal.

"I've been a-slantin' a eye at yore layout yere," Easy Goin' commented when he returned. "It's right gilt-edged. A man c'u'd ride by a mile away an' neveh think they was a thing but cottonwoods yere."

Bud chuckled.

High up on a ridge above Dead Man's Draw, Baldy Moody, who had been gathering up loose horses for the Box Plumb Bob remuda, sat watching Bud and George canter to the cottonwoods. When they disappeared among the trees he put the high power field glasses, with which he had been looking at them, in his saddle pocket, and rode with a smile back to the ranch.

That night he went to town and reported to Kickin' Pete what he had seen. Pete set out immediately and conveyed the information to the cattlemen's association, which detailed him to watch the Pinon Hills, and, when the time was ripe, to signal the ranchers with a blanket-fire sign from the top of the ridge. It was agreed that the owners would then ride, in a posse, in answer to that signal. Shroeder had sown suspicion in the association, against the new stray-man of the Box Plumb Bob.

It was about ten o'clock that night when Baldy turned in.

"Where's Easy Goin'?" he asked Spittin'.

"I reckon he musta found a mess of fence-misery. But don't worry none 'bout that *hombre*. He's gotta sleep jest so often on th' soil or he gets the hives," the foreman answered with a chuckle.

NOW, old-timer," said Bud as Easy Goin' was ridin' away after breakfast, "if y'u really wants to borrow my hoss, an' I ain't home, just stick Saul Sam in my corral an' take the pony. That's all y'u gotta do. Y'u say y'u'll be a-ridin' *south*?"

"Yep, plumb south; I reckon it's a even forty miles fr'm where we stand. He c'n round-trip that in a day, cain't he."

"An' neveh wet a hair. Y'u won't be ridin' *no'th*?"

"Jest south all th' time. I got a dern fool notion an' I wants to pla-- out the string to make a gal happy."

"Hell's buttonholes! I thought y'u wasn't none particular 'bout any Jane."

"Well, I ain't, right crazy-like, yet. But I was a-wantin' to get her some flowers I bet she neveh seen."

"*Flowers!*"

"Uh-huh. Does it sound silly?"

"Lissens like a lie."

"Well, it shore ain't," laughed George. "I knows a place where I c'n get them evenin' primroses like we has in Wyomin' an' along th' Front Range of Colorado. Y'u've seen 'em. Them kind what opens only at night."

"They ain't aroun' yere."

"I knows a place south of yere where they is, though. I wants some of them an' I'm also goin' to catch one of them hawk-moths."

Bud shot a quick look into Easy Goin's face.

"Catch what?" he asked quietly.

"Hawk-moth. One of them babies what flies an' gets its honey at night off them primroses."

"Oh," exclaimed Bud, "y'u is figurin' on transplantin' them flowers an' the moths on the same garden site, huh?"

"Y'u said it," answered George stepping into his saddle.

"When y'u ridin'?"

"Some day this comin' week. That be all right with y'u? I'll jog this way, stick Sam in yore pasture, then saddle that road-walker of yores an' high tail."

"That's jake with me. So long."

"So long," said Easy Goin', turning out of the trees.

He rode diagonally across the broken and *arroya*-gashed flat till he came to the end of the wire fence which had been strung along that side of the Box Plumb Bob. Down this he went till, just as he was topping a small rise, he saw a long line of cattle plodding out of the trees ahead and moving in concerted action toward a low point where two hills sloped down to a narrow draw.

"Huh," he mused, "that bunch has got something drivin' it."

At that moment two riders loomed on the rim of a hogback and soon he made them out clearly. They were edging the flank of the string toward the line of fence which closed the draw to the passage of cattle into the rich feeding grounds beyond. Slowly Easy Goin' put Sad Sam back into the trees and worked the horse forward over the brow of one of the hills till he came to a break in the trees; here he could watch the actions of the riders who had now dismounted.

The cattle were piling up behind them; their moos and bawls, the sound of clashing horns and pawing feet, reached George with an ominous portent. The men were about to cut the fence and drive the cattle in on Box Plumb Bob grass. He saw a pair of wire-cutters flash in the sunlight; then he pulled a carbine from a saddle boot.

As one of the men stepped toward the wire the 30-30 barked and a slug spat into the dust beneath the fence. Both men jumped for their saddles and tore away, Easy Goin' smiling as he prodded them to greater speed with dust flicks about their trail.

When they had disappeared he turned the cattle about and headed them for the Pinon Hills. Then he rode home. He had, however, noted the brand on the cows; it was the Diamond Bar Hanging N. That night after supper he took Spittin' aside and told him what he had done.

"That Diamond Bar Hangin' N belongs to old Phil Shroeder an' he's buckin' us worse than the whole lot of the others," Bill commented. "I'll be a-ridin' up to read the Book of Job to him some of these days. I wish y'u'd of made them punchers spit up something except Horseshoe-plug juice. That w'u'd of brought things to a point where we c'u'd a drew cards an' filled."

The next morning Spittin' Bill an' Easy Goin' drove to town in a wagon to get some barbed wire, and Rootin' Tootin' Shootin' Dave Houten rode Sad Sam when he and Yakima Frank went to the southwest corner to keep that section free of any trespassing stock. Early in the afternoon, as Rootin' Tootin' was sidling up a swale alone, Yakima at that time being engaged in repairing a top strand of wire a half mile away, a rifle cracked and Dave felt a stab of pain shoot through his right hip. He fell out of the saddle and Sad Sam galloped down the draw toward Yakima.

As soon as Frank saw the empty saddle on the frightened horse, he shook out a small loop, roped the big chestnut and, tying it to his horn, began to back-track its trail. When he came to the spot where Dave had fallen he took in the situation at once, and, dismounting, led his horse as a shield before him while he walked beside it to the wounded man.

"Take yore time," said Rootin' Tootin'. "They've vamosed. I slanted a eye oveh at that patch of aspen an' I saw one of 'em. He was a-wearin' a white shirt, a purple neck-scarf an' a Tom Watson Stetson; an' a-ridin' a speckled pony with a white star in its face an' a white left front foot. Y'u know 'im."

"Yes, he's the new trail boss f'r the Diamond Bar Hangin' N."

"I reckon he's got a post-office address."

"Yep, y'u an' me c'n ride right up to his front door any time afteh y'u gets well. Is y'u hu't bad?"

"I don't think it went no place but through that bundle of hip fat of mine on the right side; but she's sure fillin' my boot. Got a clean rag?"

"How's this?" and Yakima untied his white silk neckerchief.

"Stuff the tail of that in the hole an' then maybe I can canter on home. Ain't I the unluckiest——"

"Do y'u know w'at?" Frank, interrupted

as he slipped down Dave's overalls and began to plug the wound.

"Go ahead, talk scandal. That damn thing hu'ts so y'u won't mind if I cuss a li'l, willya?"

"I'm a-thinkin' that bunk of hot lead wasn't meant for you."

"That don't make no difference, as the gal said when I kissed her in the dark, thinkin' she was my quail. I stopped it."

"Y'u was a-ridin' Sad Sam an' they jest figured y'u to be Easy Goin'. He's sure a luck-hound, now ain't he?"

"Yah, y'u is right. Wait till I kids the kid about this. Pull up my pajamas an' let me climb aboard that camel y'u're a-ridin'. Sad Sam mayn't like cripples."

SAD GOIN' and Spittin' Bill had just issued from the cook-house dining-room as Rootin' Tootin' and Yakima entered the yard; Dave's face was grim, blanched and drawn and he swayed as his pony stopped. Yakima leaped forward and eased him to the ground.

Then he swooned completely as the foreman and George reached his side. After he had been made comfortable in the bunk-house and one of the men had galloped away for the doctor, Spittin' Bill sought Easy Goin'.

"Hook up two fresh broom-tails an' stick this in my boot," he said quietly, giving the boy a carbine. "Y'u got yorn, 'ain't y'u?"

"Uh-huh," answered George. "What's comin' off?"

"Hair-trigger Vetters, trail-boss f'r the Diamond Bar Hangin' N dropped a 32-40 soft-nose into Dave's pelvic bone. Since that outfit's belly-achin' for powder smoke, y'u an' me's ridin' to tell 'em they'll have to look out for themselves fr'm this time on. Maybe y'u better hang another gun on yore other hip to keep yore weight even. Us is plenty, ain't we?"

"I reckon if we took along more'n two we'd be right yellow. When y'u ridin'?"

"Soon's I get Rootin' Tootin' talkin' something else 'xcept Missouri. He's back now at Fee Fee church. If he dies——"

Mazie ran up to the men.

"Is Dave hurt?" she asked.

"Yas'm," answered Bill. "He was throwin' out his hip an' along c'm a hunk of simmerin' lead an' whammed him reg'lar. But he's all right."

"Where is he?"

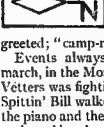
"In his bunk. Y'u better hesitate at the door; he may be usin' Bible words in a barber-shop fashion."

The girl dashed away, Spittin' Bill following her.

When Easy Goin' had the horses saddled Bill stood waiting for him at the corner of the fence and together the two rode away in the gathering gloom. At nine-thirty they tied their ponies outside of the Monte Carlo.

"He's in there," announced Spittin', looking over the front curtains. "I'll slip in by the side door. When y'u see me hoist my first slug y'u slither in the front, an' start cannonadin' if y'u see a hand feelin' for a hip or a finger stray toward a belly-band. These babies carries one hide-out stingy gun all the time."

"On yore way."



THE Diamond Bar Hangin' N men, five of them, were grouped about their trail-boss as Spittin' shoved open the door behind the bar and walked smilingly toward them.

"Howdy, boys," he greeted; "camp-meetin' night?"

Events always ceased their processional march, in the Monte Carlo, when Hair-trigger Vetters was fighting his liniment. Now that Spittin' Bill walked toward him, cards, craps, the piano and the bank all stopped simultaneously. Abandon was in the air. Dance girls cringed in corners; weakling men slunk along the side walls, and the brows of Vetters moved darkly.

"Is y'u lookin' f'r strife?" he asked Bill.

"I'm cravin' lickер, raw, red an' riotous. Looks like y'u is boiled up fit to slap a silver-tip plumb toothless. Gimme that tall bottle, Eddie," this to the man back of the bar.

As the grizzled foreman poured a medium drink in a glass, he faced about and dropped one hand to a vest pocket. With the other he reached for the glass and lifted it level with Vetters' face. At that moment Easy Goin' stepped into the front door, his hat pulled down to shade his eyes, his shapely legs widely separated; his arms hung loosely at his side.

Had Hair-trigger seen a ghost it would not have racked him more; nor, for that matter, would the effect have been different upon the minds of his companions. He had but finished describing to them how he had knocked Easy Goin' out of the saddle at four hundred yards. George waited dramatically until his presence was thoroughly felt in that room; then he strolled forward, a smile

wreathing his lips, a flaming fire flecking from his eyes.

"W'at y'u seein', Trigger," mocked Spittin'. "Y'u didn't figger on hittin' nothin' with peep-sights, didya?" He gulped his drink, adding directly, "Easy Goin' says y'u shoots high."

Two wall-lamps were instantly extinguished; a gambler pulled down a hanging-lamp and blew out the wick. Save for the lone light directly above Vetters, the room was in darkness. Men scraped the floor as they hurried to points of safety. A woman stifled a groan; another laughed hideously, and the bartender dropped back of the heavy ice-box. Spittin's finger toyed with the partly filled whisky bottle. Vetter's face writhed, and purple spots flushed under his skin. Frenzy had succeeded stupefaction and amazement.

"Y'u fed two of my boys some of yore fancy stuff yesterday," he said, looking at George.

"That's me. I'm ridin' fence on that end an' yore boys don't believe in wire. So I headed 'em to y'u. They run like chipmunks—an' is loaded with guts, in the heels."

"I don't aim none to have my punchers made bull's-eyes f'r pot-shooters like y'u."

"Maybe y'u wanta swear out a warrant for them wire-cutters I stole w'en they dropped 'em."

"Our cows water where they's water, an' no damn man's goin' to fence us out. Y'u hear me?"

"Lissen, big boy," Spittin' interrupted, "the only difference 'tween y'u an' Tom Horn is this: he's lissenin' to the angels sing an' y'u is gettin' ready to do the same thing. We ambled in yere to-night an' kicked up a little dust to tell y'u bad babies we aims to run the Box Plumb Bob like a cowcamp. Bendin' backbones, renigin' on our rights, an' all them things, is barred f'm now on. Mr. Webster's lady-like, but we's old Jaspers what ain't been off th' loco weed right long.

"Now, I'm tellin' y'u, an' I forked my dry-hide twelve miles to do it, that we don't want no sheriff, no county attorney an' no investigation of that shootin' this noon; but the first one of yore boys, an' more particular y'u, that we gets in sight of our fences, that starts the bazaar."

The hysterical girl sprang for the side door and opened it with a loud gasp. As Vetters turned his head at the sound, Spittin' Bill threw the whisky bottle and smashed the remaining lamp, shrouding the room in gloom. Three guns barked in the dark. Then four more.

Spittin' Bill and Easy Goin' now prone on the floor, heard the flashing forty-fives bury their loads in the polished surface of the bar. Then a thick silence fell about the room. Vetters jumped back and a terrific explosion took place; two of his own men, startled at his action, had discharged their guns into his body. Spittin' reached for George and, clutching his shoulder, bent his mouth to his ear.

"At 'em," he whispered.

Easy Goin' arose, and as Hair-trigger's body was slumping to the floor, he leaped close to the bar, followed by his foreman. Before the boys holding up Vetters knew what had occurred, the heavy Colts in Easy Goin's hands—and he was using each as a hammer—were flailing out in the dark and meeting heads and bodies with dull and heavy impact. That assault had in it the essence of dismay; it was awesome, because it was unknown. Each Diamond Bar Hanging N man was filled with a fear that he was being attacked by another of his crew. Each felt the urge of flight and, as if in obedience to an identical prompting each rushed toward the open front door and crowded through it to the street. Vetters groaned as he rolled on the floor, and then a faro-dealer flashed an electric torch. In its rays, Spittin' Bill and Easy Goin' were discovered, one near the bar, the other in the middle of the room. A dark spot on Hair-trigger's white shirt told the tale of his injury.

"Out that door," yelled the man with the light, "the side door."

Bill recognized the voice of a friend. In a wild leap George flung open the door and allowed Bill to precede him. Then he too jumped from the room and slammed the door back of him. They secured their horses, jerked out their carbines, and, riding one behind the other, swept the shadows for signs of lurking foes as they walked their ponies toward the end of the street. When the last of the town's buildings had been passed, Spittin' slowed up.

"I'll bet old Hair-trigger's in for one hell of a siege of chills an' fever now," he said as George breasted him. "Did y'u see how they punctured him?"

"Well," said Easy Goin' in mock seriousness. "I'm just about Christian enough to hope its nothin' triflin'."

"Here they come," shouted Bill as the sounds of rushing hoofs were heard following them. Then the moon came out from behind the mountains and a soft and golden light fell over the fast traveling clouds of dust that hung like ghostly ribbons in the air, one following the other.

Two miles out the Diamond Bar Hangin' N men gave up the pursuit and wound their way back to the Monte Carlo. Vetters was laid out on the bar and a doctor was bending over him.

"Shot in the back," said the physician. "Two balls whim-whammed him cross-ways. If he's right careful I'm afraid he's goin' to get well in six weeks."

The diagnosis started something. The piano boomed with a crash; men settled about the bank; the dance space filled, and the room rang with laughter.

A Mexican porter started sweeping up bits of broken glass under the lamp Spittin' had crashed. Monte Carlo was itself once more. After a while gentle hands carried Vetters across the street and put him to bed in the Live And Let Live Hotel.

"Close that window," he commanded. "I never c'u'd stand that song."

From across the street came the refrain:

The old gray mare c'm tearin' out the wilderness,
Tearin' out the wilderness, tearin' out the wilderness;
The old gray mare c'm tearin' out the wilderness,
Ridin' on a lamb.

THE hours succeeding that wild flight from town drifted by delightfully for Easy Goin' as he rode his line, his mind forever abloom, always conjuring up some bit of fantasy which had for its very core the face or figure of Mazie.

They were getting along famously and were the most genuine pals, meeting and greeting each other frankly, talking freely, riding or walking about the ranch head-quarters in a camaraderie that was ideal. Perhaps, had there been strain in their contact, George would have been ill at ease; for his besetting weakness—shame even, to himself—was his fear of women. In their presence he was shy, silent, clumsy; as he put it, "liable to build a loop an' throw myse'f with my tongue-tied tongue."

Superb mistress of her own mind as she was, Mazie found this retiring quality in Easy Goin' a thing of charm. She allowed no occasion to arise which would imbue him with thoughts of her femininity. Yet, all the while, he was essential to her; a great and growing love for his society was coming to flower within her.

Three nights after the affair in the Monte Carlo, an event transpired which added more fuel to her regard for him and brought her the sudden realization of what he really meant to her. She sat in the warm air under the pepper-trees, between the bunkhouse and the cook-shack, listening to the whippoorwills and night-hawks, the homey bawling of stray calves coming out of the river meadows. Easy Goin' was in the bunkhouse reading a book she had given him.

From the men's quarters the low sound of conversation drifted to the girl, through the open windows, like a hum. Suddenly there came an exclamation, followed by a period of silence and this succeeded by the coarse voice of Baldy Moody.

"All wimmin is alike, give 'em the chance," he blurted.

"I w'u'dn't say that," came the slow drawl of Easy Goin', carrying distinctly out of the windows to the listening girl.

"Of co'se y'u w'u'dn't," ejaculated Baldy, "'cause Mazie Webster's locoed y'u proper."

"Keep that name off yore lips, y'u hear me?" there was a deadly menace to the words, that caused a flutter to the girl, but which was not distinguished by the other speaker.

"I will like hell," came the malicious reply. "An', what's mo', I knows I'm plumb right. I've seen her lallygaggin' with y'u back of them blue-gum windbreaks. W'y y'u must think——"

There was the disagreeable sound of bone gritting against bone; then the dull thud of a fallen body, the scramble of flying feet and a crash of upset chairs. Spittin' Bill's voice warned, amid the confusion.

"Don't go for to yank that gun, Baldy!"

Mazie chilled as she heard another voice.

"Let him pull it, the low-lived mother-dirtyin' skunk; if he wants to jerk his iron let him whip it."

Mazie reached the bunkhouse door in a frenzy of fear, yet, as she came in the room, she calmed.

"What's the matter, boys?" she asked quietly.

Jerkin' Jim struck Oh Oh Jones in the mouth with an outflung hand. He tried to speak but his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; he puckered his lips and stamped his feet in a sheer and futile exasperation.

"These boys," volunteered Spittin' Bill, suavely, "is a-arguin' religion. Cussin' an' discussin' certain creeds. Easy Goin's a hard-shell Baptist an' Baldy, seems like, is a Seven Day go-as-y'u-please Adventurer or Adventist. They's all right, Miss Mazie; nothin' serious. Baldy's quittin', he says, right now."

Glancing in a significant manner toward Easy Goin', and without making a comment,

Mazie left the room and walked to the ranchhouse, her heart a-flutter, her mind in a whirl, as she sat staring into the flying flames of a mesquite fire.

"So," she mused, "the boys have noticed my attention to George. Very well, I'll take the bridle off now and let them see it wide open."

After a while she heard the harness-shed door slam, then the soothing tones of Easy Goin' speaking to a horse and the flapping sound of wooden stirrups and the restless feet of a dancing pony. She waited behind the curtains, the lamp turned low, until she saw Easy Goin' ride out of the yard and turn toward the river.

IT DID not require much effort or time for her to change her house dress for her riding things, nor to saddle her own pony. Soon she was loping madly in the brilliant moonlight toward a black and bobbing object which she knew to be the rider of a slow walking bronco.

"Where are you going?" Mazie asked as she neck-reined her pinto to the side of Easy Goin's saddle.

"I'm plumb sick, I reckon, gettin' mad thataway. I was a-wantin' to hear the crickets."

"Don't try that," said the girl. "I heard every word that passed. It was splendid of you to defend me—George."

This was the very first time she had called him by his given name and the sound of it on her lips filled him with a great tumult. Across the pale light she extended her hand and he grasped it impulsively, feeling a warm return of his emotion in the pressure of her fingers.

"He won't be here after to-morrow," she said. "Didn't you hear what Bill said?"

"I ain't down-right tickled at seein' a good puncher like Baldy let out; but I'm daid shore he was tryin' to prod me into a gun-fight, an' I caint figger out what he was a-aimin' at. Seems Oh Oh's been watchin' Moody. He told me this mornin' that the Chinaman told him that Baldy was a-talkin' serious an' confidential to Kickin' the other day when Jim Sam was uptown marketin'! Oh Oh an' Yakima got a idea that Kickin's fixin' to fix me in some dirty way."

"Don't think any more about it. Let's rest a while."

"They's a good place; y'u wait till I pull my slicker outa the tie-strings."

"Never mind, the grass isn't wet," and she leaped to the ground, tossing the lines away.

As the horses went to feeding on the sweet grass Easy Goin' flung himself at her feet. Across a blooming field of alfalfa an idle wind stole, wafting the heavy aroma of the blossoming hay over them in a charming manner.

"Isn't that odor delightful," she prattled enthusiastically. "I wonder if you love flowers as I do, Easy Goin'?"

"I reckon I do," he replied. Then he thought of the primroses he had found in the hidden canyon of the Devil's Pincushion. "Y'u see that," he said suddenly, bringing out his notebook and opening it to the withered leaves and blossoms he had placed there. "Y'u hold the book while I strike a light."

As the match flared up Mazie glanced at the tiny dead blooms.

"Them little fellers is called Evenin' Primroses," Easy Goin' went on enthusiastically. "They blooms only at night an' die the next day. Then theys a big ugly lookin' moth as snoops around them li'l dudes, sippin' the honey an' gettin' its whiskers all messed up with the licorice inside them li'l cup-like blossoms. A ethnologist or botanist or something-like-that-kind-of-a-feller, that I was campin' with, one time, explained them babies to me. The moth flies at night; the flower blooms at night. The hawk-moth takes the seed fr'm flower to flower, an' in this away keeps 'em alive. No moth, no flower; an' vicie versa. Funny, huh!"

"Creepy," she replied in an awed tone. "Where did you get this?"

"When I flopped into that water-hole I seen them li'l dandies. Jerkin' an' Bill says I stumbled into something nobody knows nothin' about. That place was Lost Gulch."

"In the old days the canyon had a bad name. Mr. Ruggles, who lives north of us, is the only man, but you, I ever heard of who has seen the spot. Down there is where these primroses came from?"

"Yes, the place is full of 'em."

"Would they grow at the ranch?"

"I don't see why not. If y'u had them moths, they'd keep growin' fr'm year to year. Maybe sometime I'll ride an' get y'u some of them things 'bout half grown. I c'u'd make it in one day on two hosses; it's only sixty miles fr'm yere."

"We'll go together."

"Then y'u'd like to see 'em, huh?"

"I'd love to. Can't we make the trip together?"

"Y'u don't know how plumb fierce that sun is. An' it'd be tough if we got caught in

a dust-storm. I jest figger y'u ain't as good a dust-eater as I am."

"We'll see just the same. When father gets back from Kansas City I'm going to plan it. I must have some of those plants. And I know the north side of the house would be the very bed for them. But you mustn't try that ride unless I'm with you. It would be too much for you to do, for me."

"Shucks, y'u said we was buddies."

"Exactly," she said, watching his face covertly.

"Well, then, y'u're shore goin' to get them li'l sweeties, for yore garden patch. Do y'u know I had a buddie once what rode two hundred miles in a Montana blizzard when he heard I had the measles, an' packed a fruit can plumb full of saffron to make me some healin' tea. When he got back to his outfit, he hadn't any mo' job'n a rabbit. A buddie ain't wo'th much if he won't ride a li'l for a feller."

"That's the spirit of our country, Easy Goin'," she replied faintly. Then, caught in the mystery of her own tumultuous emotions, she arose abruptly and said, "I think we had better be riding back now."

After putting away the ponies, Easy Goin' saw Spittin' Bill sitting on the edge of the water-trough. "Baldy rode uptown a while ago an' we boys been talkin' this thing all out," the foreman said when George came up.

"What thing?"

"They's been hoss-stealin' goin' on to the no'th; just got the word to-day. An' we thinks somebody's hidin' out them cayuses an' that maybe Kickin' an' the Diamond Bar Hangin' N is fixin' to frame up on y'u. The boys says y'u're to stick to the bunkhouse an' not go driftin' off by yorse'f. They might, these snake smart hombres, try an' run in a bunch outside our fence an' let y'r ride up to 'em an' then catch y'u. Cold-deck y'u, don't y'u see?"

"Uh-huh. All right, I won't mind pastimin' myself with a hunk of shade; but——"

A sudden thought flamed into Easy Goin's mind and, pulling Bill close to him, he outlined his conversation with Mazie.

"Now," he concluded, "while I'm loafin' an' playin' airy-feller, w'y cain't I take a vacuum-bottle, slide down to that place with old Sad Sam an' stuff that bottle full of blooms an' catch me a moth an' high-tail back yere. I c'n round-trip that landscape in a day an' a night. Start in the mornin' an' get back about sun-up the next day. Let me go, willya; but don't y'u say nuthin' to *her* till I'm gone. She wants to follow me."

"Where at is these damn fool things?"

"Oh, 'bout sixty mile fr'm yere. I knows jest how to make it."

"Y'u knows this is windy time, too, don't y'u?"

"Boy, how c'm y'u talk to a feller like me what shook hands with ev'ry form of agitated air they is, in Wyomin', Colorado, Kansas an' west Panhandle? Does y'u think I'd hold my breath till I bust? I ain't feared a wind."

"All right slide out early afore anybody gets up."

AS JIM SAM was starting the fire, Easy Goin' came into the cook-shack, ate a bit of cold breakfast, secured a large iron cup to be used as coffee-pot, selected some bread, bacon, coffee and a bit of sugar, and, picking up a vacuum-bottle, left the kitchen. With saddle bags bulging with horse feed and his utensils, he loped slowly from the ranch. In the late morning he wound his way down the last hog-back which lay between the Piñon Hills and Bud's homestead.

When he reached the cottonwoods he halted and shouted, "Hallo." No answer came in return to his call and so, leading Sad Sam into the corral and Bud's tall rangey horse out of it, he quickly re-saddled and headed at a fast clip directly south.

Had he turned at any point during the next six miles, he would have seen small white puffs of smoke ascending from a bald knob on the highest part of the Piñon Hills. And he would have recognized in those whiffs of cloud-like vapor the ancient Indian smoke-signal for assistance, known to all desert men. But he was filled with a high happiness and delighted with the rate of speed the superb animal under him was showing. Shortly before five o'clock he wound down the steep sides of Lost Gulch and came out at the exact spot where he had fallen in the water. There in the thick ooze he saw a skeleton.

"Huh," he said aloud, tying up his horse, after removing the saddle, "the ravens shore got y'u picked clean, didn't they, old fryin'-pan?"

Then the wind began to blow. The sky filled with a scud of whitish clouds, smoke-tinged on their edges, and the horse raised its head and whinnied shrilly. From afar came an echoing cry; then the sough and sob and howl of the disturbed air, in the pocket of the plain, thoroughly benumbed Easy Goin'.

He carried some dry wood to a sheltered

portion of a side wall and began his preparations for supper.

"They won't be no gettin' of me out of yere in the mornin' with this wind," he mused. "I reckon a first-class sleep an' a loaf till to-morrow night is jest about the bill-of-fare for y'u. Anyhow, them primroses an' hawk-moths ain't a-goin' to do much sasshayin' in this breeze."

When his meal was over he made a bed of his saddle blanket and slicker and, thoroughly exhausted, for he had slept none the night before, he rolled on his side and went to sleep.

When he awoke the morning light was streaming everywhere and the first thing he saw out of his half opened eyes was a pair of dusty boots and the stock of a rifle. He attempted to arise.

"Don't do that!" The words came with a sharp and cracking dissonance.

Easy Goin' raised his face and looked into the eyes of an old man, above a white beard. Somehow the situation tickled him.

"Old-timer," he said, "what's the idear?"

"They's damn few more ideas f'r y'u, son; y'u're done."

"I'm not aimin' to hu't y'u."

"Y'u said it, boy; y'u ain't got no hu't left in y'u."

"Meanin' which?"

"'Cause we boys has pulled yore stinger."

"Is y'u locoed, old man, or is this yere a dream. Who y'u-all reckon I is?"

"One of the hawk-moths we been tryin' to snag."

"Hawk-moths?" the effect of that term chilled George to the marrow.

"Uh-huh, ev'ry bit of that. Get up!"

Easy Goin' rolled out of the slicker and, as he reached for his boots, he saw the grim and dust-caked faces of a group of men around the corner of his shelter.

"Never mind them boots," the voice of the old man sounded monotonously. Y'u ain't a-going' to do much hard-standin'."

The faces of the men broke into grim smiles; one man laughed and spat into the sand. George arose quickly to his feet and pulled on his boots, unconscious of their ghastly humor.

"All right, search him, after he gits them butterflies wingin' up his shins."

As he stood erect two men went through his vest pockets with a dexterity which charmed him. They found a sack of flake tobacco, some papers, a half dozen extra 44 shells and —the notebook. Opening this, one of the men ran through it speedily, wetting a finger from time to time. At length he stopped at the page which contained the sketch of Lost Gulch. He handed the open book to the old man without a comment.

"Where'd y'u git this?"

"I drew it."

"Uh-huh; somebody hold yore hand?"

"Now, old man, this yere thing's gone far enough. I'm wo'kin' for the Box Plumb Bob. On my way in to this country I fell outa the saddle when a old dry-hide I was a ridin' snaked me half daid out of a dust storm into this place. Then, when he died— why, yondeh 's his frame-work layin' in the water right now, that's him——"

Nobody followed his gaze. He went on.

"I see I was plumb up against the razzoo an' I packed my saddle on my back, stumbled out to a road an' Jerkin' Jim toted me to Mr. Webster's place. All them boys knows me fr'm the ridin' I did with 'em up no'th."

"Uh-huh."

"They knows I ain't no cow-thief."

"We knows it, too." There was a veiled significance to the comment.

"Huh, then w'y all them curdled looks an' this yere friskin' of my pockets."

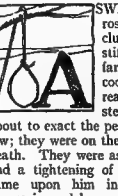
"Y'u're a hoss-thief. Y'u shore c'n tell a hoss. An y'u got power over hosses. How c'm y'u lay a laig over Sad Sam an' paralyze him so he cain't buck? How c'm y'u do that?"

"Who said he c'u'dn't buck?"

"Kickin' Pete lost sixty to y'u, didn't he?"

"Take me back an' ask some of them other fellers who seen him pound me till my hair clinched on my brains."

"We don't aim to take y'u no place; we're leavin' y'u."



A SWEEPING storm of chill rose up in Easy Goin' and clutched at his heart and stifled his breath. He was far too familiar with the code of the frontier not to realize that these rough, stern men about him were about to exact the penalty of a breach of its law; they were on the business of death—his death. They were assembled to lynch him, and a tightening of the cords of his neck came upon him instinctively. He knew persuasion, delay, suggestion, promise or threat were of no avail; these men had definitely made up their minds. Nothing could alter their decision. He looked around but saw no face he had ever seen before.

"What's yore evidence?" he asked, amazed at the tremor of his voice.

"That hoss y'u're ridin' is my Walkin' Boy; I lost him four days ago."

Then swift, certain, surging understanding came to George. It swept over him and left him dry. His lips framed the word

"Bud" and his mind recalled how swiftly the boy was traveling through the Piñon Hills that day he had met him; how carefully he had asked the direction of Easy Goin's journey when George had requested the loan of the horse. He saw it all now—Bud was the rustler; Bud had unconsciously loaned him the very means which now was damning him to a shameless death. Caught with the stolen horse. He knew what that meant.

"I borrowed that 'ere horse," he said weakly.

"An' them eighteen others up in the 'corral, too?"

He flung about at a sound and saw other men approaching. In front of them was a worn and jaded bunch of horses; they clearly exhibited the marks of a hard drive over the desert. Between two horsemen, his hands tied behind his back, walked the slim, almost girlish figure of Bud.

"Did y'u borrow them, too," insisted the old man.

"Ask Bud, he'll tell y'u." To have saved his life Easy Goin' could not have prevented the smile which stole to his face and flashed warmly to the dejected figure walking toward him between two riders.

"Let's be gettin' it oveh with, Ruggles," spoke one of the men guarding Bud. "Bring that lady-like *hombre* along behind me."

"Wait!"

The words snapped through the gulch like the crack of a mule-whip. Bud had leaped beyond his guards and was now running toward Easy Goin'.

"How c'm y'u yere?" he said.

"'Member 'bout them flowers I was a-tellin' y'u 'bout? That's w'y I c'm."

"Y'u damn fool. Didja ride my hoss?" As he said this he looked at the old man.

"That's him, ain't it?" George nodded toward the horse that had carried him to the gulch.

Bud laughed.

"Say, Old Man Ruggles, y'u an' these fellers is just forty kinds of a damn fool. This kid don't know nothin' 'bout that hoss or ary hoss; I done it all. Y'u hear me? An' I had that walkin' fool up to my place at the heel of the Piñon Hills. Y'u don't want to jerk up a man what ain't done nothin', do y'u?"

"C'm on, feller," said a member of the posse, taking Bud's arm gently, "we don't wanta get rough with y'u."

The boy withered the man with a look.

"Y'u don't believe me?" he cried in a questioning tone.

"Hold on, Jim," cautioned the old man.

"Y'u c'm down here to get flowers?" he asked Easy Goin'.

"Yaas, suh. Is y'u Mr. Ruggles what is the only livin' man who knows this yere gulch, 'sides me an' Bud?"

"Who told y'u that?"

"Miss Mazie Webster, night afore last. It was for her I was gettin' the flowers. Them's the kind, right oveh there; evenin' primroses. Know about them?"

"Y'u must think we's not dry behind the ears yet," blurted Ruggles. "That's the time y'u had oughta kept yore mouth shet. I reckon, boys, this ceremony's gotta go on."

Two men standing behind George grasped and trussed up his arms in a dexterous flip of a small tie-rope. He tried to talk but the words died in his throat and then out of the sheer wantonness of that which was about to occur he roused to a sense of anger, of outrage.

"Y'u damned old porcupine," he shouted at Ruggles. "If y'u go through with this y'u'll regret it. I c'n prove what I say if y'u'll take me back to her."

"Who?"

"Miss Mazie."

"Le's go," urged a voice.

"C'n I write a note to her."

"I'll write it f'r y'u," said Ruggles, feeling for a pencil and opening Easy Goin's notebook.

"Is y'u all set?"

"Go on, an' don't spenk the words too fast; I ain't never won no contests on writin'."

George began to dictate:

"Don't you worry none; it's jest one of them jams most ev'rybody flies into. But w'en y'u gets this I won't be worth nothin' flat. If I had of lived I reckon I'd made a damn fool outa myse'f, for, Mazie honey, I shore loves y'u. These fellers, Old Man Ruggles specially don't believe I rid yere after evenin' primroses an' hawk-moths. What them sorta fellers know about the kinda feelin's I got f'r y'u? Give my saddle to Rootin' Tootin', my bridle to Bill, my gun to Oh Oh an' whenever y'u think of primroses think a li'l bit of me.

"C'n I sign it?" he finished.

"Damn my orn'ry old hide, co'se y'u c'n sign it. Leave him loose, one of y'u boys."

As Easy Goin' wrote his name and handed the book back to Ruggles, he felt the small lass-rope draw his elbows together.

"*Hi!*"

The sound of the exclamation rang down from the trail on the cliffs. As every face glanced toward the weather-stained walls, Easy Goin' made out a file of horsemen winding down the narrow shelf. At its head, and

immediately back of a figure which he recognized as Spittin' Bill, he saw with surprise the wide white Stetson of Mazie. The posse stared in utter amazement.

"Let 'em come." Ruggles finally directed. "They cain't stop nothin' if we don't wants 'em to."

SLOWLY the little group, of eight horsemen and a girl, threaded its way to the bottom of the ribbon-trail and across the gulch to the posse, which stood, rifles in hand, covering them.

"What's comin' off," Spittin' asked.

"We caught these two with all this stock," someone answered.

"An' then what?"

"If y'u're right decent y'u c'n braid a neck knot f'r yore star buster," answered an irritated posseman.

"Braid hell," replied Bill. "C'm on, Cap'n Ruggles, an' y'u, Jim, Pete, Ed, Slim, I wanta heap of converse with y'u; think I c'n interest y'u plumb."

He moved away with the vigilantes and in a few brief moments returned.

"Turn that Easy Goin' sliver loose," commanded Ruggles. "We just lacked a li'l bit of bein' one hundred percent daid wrong on him; just about ninety-nine was all we was a-missin'. What he said was foolish, but, by the etarnal, it was true. C'm yere, Kickin'."

Easy Goin' saw a figure shamble out from behind the Box Plumb Bob ponies and recognized the face of Kickin' Pete.

"Is what y'u told Bill gospel?"

"Plumb. I wanted to git that gray-eyed, cool-skinned son-of-a-gun an' I framed with Phil Shroeder; him an' me's been in cahoots f'r the last year. We sent f'r Bud an' told him how to get them hosses. And him an' me moved 'em all, 'cept that rangey sorrel Easy Goin' was a-ridin'. I reckon Bud picked him, outa love. Anyhow, I'm done. That's all I gotta say an' y'u c'n do as y'u please."

"If we give y'u a chance to spit up w'at y'u know in co'te will v'u tell the truth on Phil Shroeder?"

"Y'u mean——"

"If we don't put a number two collar where a number sixteen oughta fit, will y'u turn state's evidence?"

"Will a mink eat fish?"

"All right, stand out there. C'm yere, Bud."

Bud stood forth. Old Man Ruggles continued to talk. His eyes were melting with a mellow light and around the hidden corners of his mouth a lovely grimace played.

"Does y'u like that hoss of mine?"

"Huh?"

"An' if y'u was a-straddle of him, an' right longside the middle peak in that sky-line-spur of hills to the southwest was a town by the name of Deming; an' in that 'ere town was a livery stable boss by the name of Hank; an' y'u had forty dollars, all in one lump like this," and the old man dropped a roll in Bud's hands, "I say, if all them 'ere things was bunched, w'u'd y'u hit the grit now or stay an' wo'k that lousy homestead in the cottonwoods?"

"Man, with that hoss an' forty dollars I'd be in Paso by to-morrow afternoon, sittin' up with a Carmencita I knows, singing, *'A la la—a la la—tru lala—a la la,'* an' fannin' myse'f."

"Then fling on yore saddle an' eat up the sand," Ruggles smiled.

"Where'll I leave yore hoss in Deming?" asked Bud.

"What do y'u s'pose I told y'u about Hank f'r? Didja think I was a-sendin' him a kiss by y'u."

"Doggone, Cap'n, I'm on my way. Men, an' ma'am," he bowed to Mazie, "if anyone ever tells y'u-all a man needs a heart in his chest, to run his carcase, make him whoa; my heart's been in my mouth f'r the last three hours. An' y'u, Easy Goin'," he said genially to George. "I'm a-wishin' y'u thirty-three degree luck. Paw me."

Easy Goin' shook Bud's hand. In a moment the slim, bouyantly alive puncher was riding up the draw. As he ascended to the blazing and level floor of the desert, Ruggles waved a hand to him in farewell.

"If that boy was a-carryin' off the mint, he w'u'dn't be a-stealin' nothin'," he said thoughtfully. "He jest ain't made to be bad. C'm on, y'u fellers; what y'u standin' yere for? Let's be gettin' these broomtails watered an' strung out."

All the men moved away, abandoning Easy Goin' to the presence of Mazie, who, up to the moment, had stood by her pinto silently staring at George.

"Why did you do it, George?" she asked when the men were out of hearing.

"Didn't Spittin' tell y'u?"

"Yes, but——" She seemed on the verge of tears.

"How c'm y'u find out?"

"The doctor told Spittin' about daylight that the vigilantes had gone to Lost Gulch led by Mr. Ruggles to get horse-thieves. Bill awoke me to look after Dave Hooten, but I came on. The dust was terrific but we

trailed you to Bud's ranch and found Pete there. Spittin' an' Yakima took him outside and what they said or what they did I don't know, but he led us here and confessed to his part of the frame-up. It looks like this section is going to be pretty easy sledding for father from now on. I know Mr. Ruggles will drive Shroeder off the range."

"Here's something that was given me by a fella to deliver to y'u," Old Man Ruggles interrupted Mazie. "It was the last request he made, jest before he thought——"

"Gimme, that thing, Cap'n. Geewillikins, Miss Mazie, don't read that!" Easy Goin' exclaimed.

Ruggles fled and so did Mazie.

Easy Goin' caught up to her just as she had finished reading the note he had written her. She raised a flaming face to his as he tried to snatch the book.

"Tell me," she said, "tell me all you meant when you wrote this; and when you tell it once—tell it again."

In the depths of her glorious eyes he saw a color and a light which led him straight, without timidity or hesitation, to an avowal which ended in a kiss. In that stark and wordless instant a man and maid went hand in hand into a land of dreams.

When they rode out of the canyon, after the sun had set, the vacuum-bottle was filled with soft black adobe ooze and half budded evening primroses. In a pasteboard box, which once had held soda crackers, fluttered two moths with hideous heads, long whiskers and widely set and popping eyes.

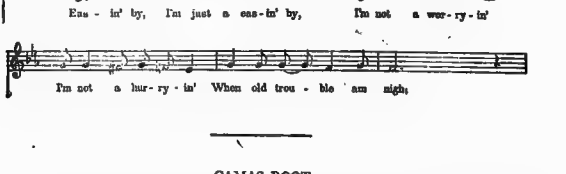
Spittin' Bill rode ahead and for breakfast the following day Jim Sam laid a company-cloth on the bunkhouse table, at the head of which sat Mazie and Easy Goin'.

Forty-two Japanese pheasants were served at that meal; and forty-one men and women ate them, including twelve vigilantes.

Thus it came about that Easy Goin' never responds to the cry of the arena-boss, as he shouts through a megaphone, "*Rider Up! Easy Goin' George comin' out of chute number one!*" He is seen no more at Roswell, Cheyenne, Calgary, Pendleton, Phoenix, Belle Fouche or Dewey.

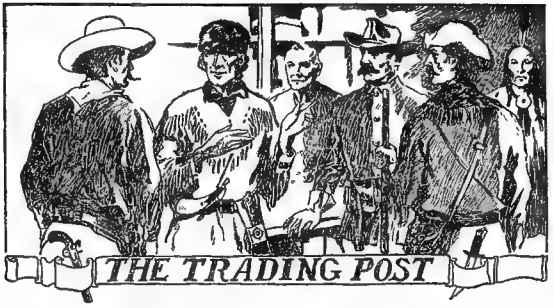
But every night at sundown he's sitting under the pepper-trees, between a certain ranch-house and a bunkhouse, listening ever and anon to a peculiar and wholly Western sound, the note of which is something like this—*sput—sput—sput*.

If traced, that fountain head of noise would be located emanating from one Spittin' Bill, as he practises his unerring fire at a knot-hole in the bunkhouse floor. As Easy Goin' fills with an ineffable peace and a girl at his side tums a guitar, he sometimes sings in a mellow tenor this quaint and homely air:



CAMAS ROOT

THIS was a tuber, the size of a small onion, which grew in the Northwest and carpeted the valleys with its blue flower. Boiled, it tasted a little like a potato; but the northwestern tribes vastly improved its edible qualities by fermenting it. In a hole in the ground they placed layers of the roots with layers of leaves and hot stones between, covered the whole pile up and let it remain undisturbed for two or three days. When ready for use they had become dark-brown or black, of a stiff-glue consistency and very sweet, with a flavor strongly resembling that of chestnuts. Mashed and pulverized into a meal, it made excellent, sun-dried cakes; the flour was cooked with tallow and meat, and also made into bread. This root was the main vegetable of the Flatheads and was an important article of trade with all the Northwestern tribes. It was not only tasty, but very nutritious, and without it most of these Indians would have been wiped out by famine.—C. E. M.



THE LONE STAR MAGAZINE

WITH this issue THE FRONTIER magazine steps into the ranks with its brothers in arms. There are already a great many magazines and each of them undoubtedly fills a need of one sort or another. Yet there is no magazine just like THE FRONTIER and we are convinced of the demand for what we intend to give. In our original announcement we said:

> The mazagine will be a monthly publication of standard size and will run complete novels, novelettes, short stories and some verse. Its general appeal will be that of the outdoor adventure magazine. In our conception the title includes the frontiers of civilization wherever found and in whatever time. Thus, the field is open for stories of the North American frontier as it advanced from the Allegheny Mountains to the Pacific Coast. Stress will be laid upon the Western frontier of America, either in the United States or Canada, but also we solicit stories of the frontiers of South America, Africa, the South Seas, the Orient and of that everlasting frontier, the Sea. A contributor to THE FRONTIER will thus have more latitude in the matter of the historical story than he has in writing for SHORT STORIES; although our primary interest will always be in the *story* value rather than in historical background or details of local color.

The point is that we have a firm belief in the vitality of the frontier tradition in American life. As Commissioner Mather says in his excellent article on the preservation of our frontiers in the National Parks, it has been a remarkably short few years since the frontier of the United States was the Allegheny Mountains. We are essentially a pioneer people and in our reading there should be room for stirring fiction of the frontier drama.

THE BIG RED STAR

FOR the reason that the great star—the Lone Star of Texas—has for so many years stood in the minds of Americans generally, and Westerners particularly, as an emblem of the frontier, we have chosen the five-pointed star as the mark which will distinguish the cover of every issue of THE FRONTIER, and beneath it, on the cover of every issue, the frontiersman's rifle, that trusty forerunner of civilization which carried American men and American ideals across the mountains and the desert. You will always know THE FRONTIER magazine by the red star and the frontiersman's rifle, and it will always be a guarantee of fiction which will, at the same time, give you information and inspiration.

If you have read Michael Williams's article, "Remember the Alamo!" you will remember something of the history of the biggest state in the Union and how the Lone Star State and its fight for independence were the keystone in the winning of the whole Southwest for the United States. Here is reason enough for the use of the brilliant star as our emblem.

A BROTHER IN MONTANA

IT IS right and proper for us at this time to make a bow of acknowledgment to our elder brother, *The Frontier*, A Literary Magazine, published three times a year by the faculty and students of the University of Montana. The magazine is under the editorship of Mr. H. G. Merriam and is the official literary magazine of the great University of this great Western state. Graduates of the University of Montana will remember it with affection. There is no rivalry between this magazine and *The Frontier* published in Montana. We are separated into two entirely different fields and we have the highest regard and respect for our Western colleague.

EVERYTHING COMPLETE

WE START off with everything complete in each issue. There are no continued stories in this number, nor will there be in any number until our readers demand it. A serial story is invariably a long one and an installment takes from twenty to thirty pages. Thus, instead of giving you one complete novel, one serial and one complete novelette, we give you in this issue a complete book length novel and three complete novelettes in addition to the usual number of short stories.

THE TRADING POST

TO THE frontiersmen the trading post was far more than a place to bring their catch and to restock their supplies. It was the meeting-place, the information center, the clubhouse of the frontier.* In its trading rooms and over its counter pioneers, trappers, traders, troopers, homesteaders, scouts, Indians, and the many others who answered the frontier's call, exchanged news of the wilderness, gossip of the lonely trail campfires, tips about game and local conditions, warnings, predictions—and just plain talk, talk for which many a lonely wanderer yearned with all his heart.

It has seemed appropriate to name this department of gossip and exchange of ideas after the institution which meant so much in frontier life and which it aims to emulate. Here we can all get a bit closer to the authors of our stories, know them as good fellows like the rest of us; here we can pick up interesting bits of information about our stories and the country in which they are laid; here we can speak up and say what we think of THE FRONTIER and how we like the yarns these story-tellers spin. Here we can exchange ideas, pass on bits of interesting frontier gossip, talk over frontier subjects and questions. This is your department—your TRADING POST; when you come to it bring something to pass on to the other fellows out on the other trails of the everlasting frontier of Life.

Already we have received some corking good letters of welcome and encouragement, from many of the best known writers. This one from Thomas Grant Springer is so good that part of it must be passed on to you:

* I congratulate you heartily on the idea of THE FRONTIER. As one who was born and raised on the last American frontier, the West Coast, who has known it from Vancouver to Balboa, Panama, and seen some of its now past life I realize only too well that the frontiers of the world are rapidly passing.

The so-called tired business man is mighty tired of many of the modern magazines, and this you will get from his own lips, especially if you consort with him, not as a writer, but as a layman, which I have not only had the privilege, but the pleasure of doing.

He is not the boob so often considered editorially, but wide awake and alert to the good things of our culture. Give him real stories, or real people and real places and he will respond and buy, and he is a large and vigorous buying public. He is a thinker, a mixer with people, a traveler, and you can't fool him as of yore. He and his forefathers have torn down our frontiers, and are tearing down others in advance of the tremendous agent, Business.

"The Covered Wagon," or "Prairie Schooner" as my grandfather knew it when he took the Overland Trail, has opened the eyes of even the movie fans. The Dollar Line is now carrying our national emblem, and ourselves, around the world, and that very sign is the key that unlocks the gates leading to the "last frontiers".

You say you will use "a little verse." I have heard beautiful quotations from rough and bearded men in strange places, on the deck of tramp steamers, in the smoking rooms of Pullmans, on the trails of tropic jungles, beside chuck wagons and in cooks' shacks of the far North.

And do not forget women, the sisters of pioneers, we have been at the side of their men in far places when they were far, and that their daughters are still listening to some of those old tales of romance such as the "flapper" never experiences. They too are an audience, they too have been actors on many a far frontier.

I fear I have been lengthy, if not suggestive, but possibly, looking for the wide horizon where the frontier always lies, you may find in my mist of words a mirage of promise as I have seen it on frontier deserts.

Thomas Grant Springer.

Equally cordial has been the welcome from prospective readers, who feel that THE FRONTIER should fill a long-felt want in the fiction field. Says one:

Buying magazines and books has kept me poor, so that I have from the time when *Short Stories* was running full length novels by James Oliver Curwood and serials mysterious, as far back as 1910, been buying your magazines on the newsstands.

From the line-up of authors promised for the first issue of THE FRONTIER I believe that you will have a winner.

Success to all the Doubleday-Page publications I need not wish, for they have been crowned with it since their first issues.

Henry W. Nauman,
Elizabethtown, Pa.

FRONTIERSMEN THEMSELVES

A FINE lot of writers we have been able to corral for this first issue of THE FRONTIER, men who are imbued with the old frontier spirit, and can tell a good story besides. More than a little of their ability comes from familiarity with the old Western frontier as it was in its prime—familiarity bred from experience. Take Frank C. Robertson, for example—with a Texas cowboy father, a frontier schoolteacher mother—and a prairie schooner cradle! No wonder he knows the frontier. Hear him:

"The Fence Builders" really seems part of my own life. My people, so far back as we can trace, were pioneers. One stream of my ancestry followed along the northern boundary of the nation, and another along the southern until the streams met on the prairies of Nebraska when my father, a Texas cowboy, met and married my mother, a frontier school teacher. They had it in the blood, that fence building instinct, for it seems to me now that we lived on a covered wagon half the time. This I do know: during the first twenty years of their marriage they never lived in one place so long as one year at a time, and their moving was always done by prairie schooner.

I recall that when I was ten years of age we began a trek of a thousand miles by wagon, from the panhandle in northern Idaho through Washington and Oregon, into southeastern Idaho. The last four hundred miles of that trip was made the next spring by my father and myself, Mother and the older boys remaining behind. I shall not forget it—the dirt, the sore lips into which the alkali ground deeper and deeper, the humiliation of being stared at, for wagon tramps were beginning to be a novelty in those days. Our money gave out long before we reached our destination, and we were forced to sell our tent, an extra set of harness, and other non-essentials. And once a man offered me five dollars for my dog! There was one of the supreme crises of my life. Dad finally decided we could get along without the five, but I know now how big that five looked to him. No wonder I love "Ole Wuthless." My dog was quite as worthless—every bit.

I had to have my fling at it. After a number of years as a migratory worker, winding up with two years of herding sheep I decided that if I was ever to amount to anything I must take up a homestead. I did, and I proved up on it. I stuck it out for seven long, lean years, building fence, grubbing brush, piling rock, plowing, harvesting, going to the canyon for wood, fighting back trespassing herds of sheep and the rest of it. There was a bit of compensation to it, too, but not in a financial way. Drouth, hail, frost, squirrels, grasshoppers, the high cost of machinery, and the low price of wheat saw to that. I was not a "gentlemen farmer" either. Many and many a day I have got up at daylight in my little one room shack, cooked breakfast, wrangled a four, or a six, or a seven horse team, worked all day and been too dog-tired to wash the dishes at night.

Frank C. Robertson.

Of such stuff were the pioneers made; on it the frontier was built, and from experiences such as this we hope to pass on to you stories that will breathe again the hope, the determination, and the glory of the old frontiers.

CLEM YORE

TO CLEM YORE the whole West will always be a vast frontier—new adventures awaiting him over each ridge, new wonders to be found in each valley. After finishing his fine novelette, "Easy Goin' of the Box Plumb Box," in this issue, you will be interested in hearing of its creation, as Mr. Yore tells it:

You might be interested to know that I first conceived this tale while on a trip with the late Enos Mills, the Western naturalist, and, to my mind, in many ways, the greatest of them all.

We had come upon four mule-deer, rather unexpectedly, and sat down on some rocks to watch them. Enos was simply charmed by any actions, all movements of game. Each motion was a lesson to him and a revelation as well.

When the deer browsed out of close range and we started on our way to his home, he stooped and, tenderly touching a plant called the evening primrose, began a most interesting review of its habits. He told me practically what I have told in this story and when I reached home I examined a work on Western wild-flowers and thereafter lay in wait for the hawk-moths which make this dainty blossom possible.

The following year, at a beef-steak fry, back of a lake near my home, I saw the moth at work. There were five in our party at the time, and one of these was an old cattleman. His conversation turned to cow and horse-thieves and when the moon arose, casting its shadows of Long's Peak across the range and lesser hills about the valley before us, he outlined a tale of a horse-thief who returned to a camp which was being watched by vigilantes, to secure a beaded glove a dance-hall girl had left there, sometime before, while out riding with him. They hung that man.

There I had my tale. It was not difficult to write, for I recalled the intense enthusiasm of Mills and the graphic, homely, tale-spinning, in the light of a harvest moon, by my old friend of the trail. The story wrote itself.

Enthusiastic and appreciative as always, Clem Yore asks permission to say a few words about an old friend who has crossed the last frontier—a man whose heart and soul were all for the frontier and the great outdoors. We endorse the sentiment he voices:

And by the way I'd like to raise my voice in this circle of friends and say a word to those who love a glorious night of reading; by all means secure a copy of one or both of these works by Enos Mills, "Waiting in the Wilderness," and "Watched By Wild Animals." You have a treat that I envy you. And remember, as you read, that Enos Mills tramped almost every part of our great West from Canada to Mexico and was the friend of men in cow camps, mining cabins and corrals. He was ever battling feeble health, but no man of his day accomplished more rugged trials with the open than he. Friend he was to humanity, to be sure; but also was he the comrade, of the stones, the sky, the birds, and the flowers. Get to know him fellows, his like has seldom been seen among the milling herds of men.

Clem Yore.

YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

THE frontier of the glorious past and the frontier of the vital present will join in the November issue of THE FRONTIER—each with the thrills and dangers that are the lot of the frontiers of all ages. Reginald Wright Kauffman will open the number with a lively novel of the Mexican border, a story in which tragedy quickly follows comedy, as the grotesque head of the sinis-

ter Eagle-and-Serpent Mutual Benefit Association moves his pawns back and forth across the border. Wilbur Hall will close the number with a thrilling long novelette written around the famous westward expedition of the Donner party, an expedition doomed to leave a trail of blood across the grim Sierras. In this gripping story Mr. Hall, well-known as a writer of stirring Western fiction, presents a realistic and impressive picture of the terrible hardships heroically borne by those who carried America's frontier to the Pacific Ocean.

Between these two fine stories will be another good novelette by Frank C. Robertson, a story of the pioneers in the Valley of Desolation; and a South African novelette by L. Patrick Greene. Both of these stories breathe of the frontier and the hardy men who there work out their own lives and the destiny of their nations.

Among the short story contributors will be Anthony M. Rud with a tale of Captain Dale and the old South; James K. Waterman with a rushing sea yarn laid in the days of the clipper ships and the slave trade—days when a sailor's life and liberty depended upon his skill of hand and brain; Magruder Maury with another tale of the Philippines. In "Jack Slade, Man-Killer," Arthur Chapman vividly describes, in dramatic article form, one of the most picturesque yet cold-blooded characters of the old frontier. Besides these, there will be others.

A special feature for the November number will be the fine editorial article by Ernest Thompson Seton. Mr. Seton needs no introduction to the thousands who have enjoyed his thrilling animal and bird books. Probably no living writer is more at home in the out-of-doors, and is better able to make his readers feel at home with him, than he. In "The Frontier Cabin as a Spiritual Experience" Mr. Seton packs all of his love for the wild. After reading it you will look around for an ax and a convenient woods in which to go and do likewise.

Watch for the Red Star on the twentieth of next month!

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Here is the greatest rug value on the market today. A handsome 9x12 Wilton Velvet rug for only $1.00 down on 30 days' Free trial—with a 27 x 52 rug absolutely FREE.

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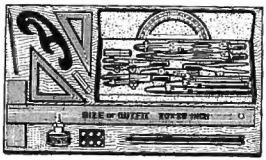

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